

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.

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VEDIC PRAYERS

पावका नः सरस्वती वाजेभिर्वाजिनीवती ।
यज्ञं वष्टु धियावसुः ॥

—Śukla Yajur Veda, 20.84

May Sarasvati, the great purifier and the presiding deity of food and wealth, grant us the fruits of our sacrifices.

चोदयित्री सूनृतानां चेतन्ती सुमतीनां ।
यज्ञं दधे सरस्वती ॥

—Śukla Yajur Veda, 20.85

Sarasvati is the inspirer of spiritual truths, ie, the Vedas. She is the giver of divine intelligence to noble souls. Sarasvati sustains (*dadhe*) our sacrifices (ie, noble deeds).

महो अर्णः सरस्वती प्रचेतयति केतुना ।
धिये विश्वा विराजते ॥

—Śukla Yajur Veda, 20.86

Sarasvati sends plenty of rains everywhere (or brings wealth and prosperity everywhere). She enkindles and manifests intelligence in all beings. We pray to such a great Goddess.

Durgā Worship

EDITORIAL

The story of how Divine Mother Durgā revealed herself to human consciousness and why she is worshipped is quite interesting. This month being extremely auspicious, when Durgā worship is performed all over India and in numerous countries abroad, let's meditate on the Divine Mother for a few moments.

Introduction

Sri Ramakrishna has declared time and again:

He who is Brahman is also Śakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called the Primordial Energy, Kālī. Brahman and Śakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. ... If you accept the one you must accept the other.¹

From the indivisible *saccidānanda*, Brahman, to the ever-blissful Mother, Durgā, the so-called 'transformation' reads like a story.

Mother Goddess in the Vedas

Many great scholars have traced the origins of Mother worship from the Vedas down to the modern age.² We shall meditate on what great masters say about Durgā.

A number of goddesses have been men-

tioned and worshipped in the Vedas, but Aditi owns an important place as she is considered to be the mother of all the gods.* Max Muller has commented that 'Aditi, an ancient God or Goddess, is in reality the earliest name invented to express the Infinite.'³ M. Hiriyanna also says that Aditi means the Infinite.⁴ This 'Infinite' has gradually got transformed into the Divine Mother.

The earliest mention of Aditi is in a hymn of the first *maṇḍala* of the *R̥g Veda* (1.89.10), though her children, the Ādityas, are mentioned earlier (*R̥g Veda*, 1.14.3). Sage Gautama is the ṛṣi of that special hymn; special because it introduces the Divine Mother. Gautama prays to many deities for protection, longevity for human beings, health, wealth, etc, and fi-

* To Romans and Greeks the mother of all the gods was Agdistis (or Cybele, Cybebe). Her most prominent quality was universal motherhood. She was the great parent not only of the gods but also of human beings and beasts. She was called the Mountain Mother. In ancient Rome, her annual festival was held between 15 and 27 March. She was worshipped in the pine branch (cf. *navapatrikā* of Durgā). On 24 March, the 'Day of Blood', her chief priest, the *archigallus* (Sanskrit, *arcaka*), drew blood from his arms and offered it to her to the music of cymbals, drums, flutes, etc. On 27 March the silver statue of the goddess, with the sacred stone set in its head, was borne in procession and bathed in the Almo, a tributary of the Tiber River. (Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.)

3. Quoted in *R̥g Veda Samhitā* (Calcutta: Haraf Prakashani, 1976), Vol. 1, p. 96.

4. M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 15.

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), pp. 107-8.

2. Only a few excellent works could be mentioned: (a) Upendrakumar Das, *Śāstra-mūlak Bhāratiya Śakti Sādhana* (Visvabharati, 1985), in two volumes in Bengali; (b) Sir John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shākta* (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1951) and *The World as Power* (1957); (c) Sri Gopinath Kaviraj, *Tāntrik Sādhana o Siddhanta* (Burdwan University, 1975), a two-volume Bengali work; (d) the Bengali *Viśvakośa*; and (d) Swami Saradananda, *Bhārate Śaktipūjā* (Udbodhan).

nally describes Aditi in this way:

अदितिर्द्यौरदितिरन्तरिक्षं
अदितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः ।
विश्वेदेवा अदितिः पञ्चजना
अदितिर्जातमदितिर्जनित्वं ॥

Aditi is all the heavens. Aditi is the space. Aditi is the mother, father, children. Aditi is all the gods and goddesses. Aditi is the five bases of creation. Aditi is the birth and Aditi is the source of everything.

In quite a few other mantras too has Aditi been called the mother of all the gods and goddesses. Apart from being called the mother of all the gods (*devān ādityān avase*) Aditi is also called the mother of the Rudras (*mātā rudrāṇām*).⁶ In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (2.1.7), Aditi has been described thus:

Aditi, who arises with life, is the soul of the gods (*devatāmāyī*). Having entered the secret chamber of the heart, she who was born with the beings remains there. She is verily That.

This shows that Aditi is both the soul of the gods, ie, the Supreme, as well as the one who is 'born with the beings.' So she is the bridge to eternity. But how did Aditi become Durgā?

From Aditi to Durgā

A remarkable hymn of the *R̥g Veda* (10.72), attributed to Sage Bṛhaspati, deals with the birth of the gods. In it is a mystical mantra, which says that Aditi is called Dakṣa's mother and, surprisingly, also his daughter:

We shall very clearly state the story of the birth of the gods. ... Before the birth of the gods, being came into existence from non-being. ... From the creation-tree (*uttānapada*), came forth the earth (*bhū*), and the upper worlds (*bhuvah*) came forth from desire. Aditi gave birth to Dakṣa, and Aditi was born of Dakṣa again. O Dakṣa! Aditi is your daughter! All the gods took birth later.

Pundits are baffled with this stanza and have explained it in several ways. Since Aditi has been called the Infinite initially, mother

next, and daughter later, we can hazard a Vedāntic meaning to all this: The Infinite, Brahman, is static. But when It is somehow enveloped by *māyā*, It becomes the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe and is called Īśvara. Īśvara evolves further to become Hiraṇyagarbha and Virāṭ. This whole dynamic state of Brahman is termed Śakti. We saw that the name given to Śakti who created everything is Aditi. So Aditi is the mother of everything and, therefore, of Dakṣa also.

Who is Dakṣa? There are several meanings to the word, like 'the author of *Dakṣa-saṁhitā*', 'Atri', 'a capable person', etc. But the most important meaning is 'Prajāpati, the father of creation'. In the *Bhāgavata* (4.6.17-8), Dakṣa, the son of Pracetasas, is called Prajāpati, the creator of all living beings. Prajāpati, or Brahmā, is the supreme creator of the gross universe. But in order to create all this, he should be there first. So he is the firstborn. The Vedāntic firstborn is called Hiraṇyagarbha. So Dakṣa Prajāpati is Hiraṇyagarbha, responsible for the grosser manifestation of the universe. Aditi became the daughter of this Dakṣa Prajāpati.

The *Nirukta* says: 'Dakṣa is called Āditya since he was Aditi's son. Again, Aditi is called Dākṣāyaṇī since she is Dakṣa's daughter.'⁸ Yāska, the author of *Nirukta*, continues, saying that the divine origins (*devadharmena itaretara-janmānau*) are difficult for us to understand.

So Dakṣa Prajāpati as the creator of the gross universe is constantly engaged in the cosmic sacrifice of creation. While Dakṣa is associated with creation, Rudra is always associated with the terrible, destructive aspect in the Vedas. So Dakṣa Prajāpati, Brahmā, creates and Rudra, who becomes Śiva in the post-Vedic age, destroys. The two powers—of creation and destruction—are like day and night. So Dakṣa and Rudra can never go together. The 'sacrifice' of Dakṣa, creation, and the 'sacrifice' of Rudra, destruction, on endlessly.

5. *R̥g Veda*, 1.89.10.

6. *R̥g Veda*, 10.66.4 and 8.101.5 respectively.

7. *R̥g Veda*, 10.72.1-6.

8. Cf. *Nirukta*, 11.23.

This is *jagat*.

We now come to the Purāṇas. According to the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Dakṣa performed a great many austerities in order to have the Divine Mother as his daughter. And Mahāmāyā, also called Aditi or *devamātā*, was born as Dakṣa's daughter, Satī. She married Rudra. Sanskritists derive the term Satī from *asti* or *sat*, meaning 'existence'. So the daughter of creation, or being, became the wife of destruction! We can see a link between creation, preservation or existence, and destruction here.

We know the famous Purāṇic story of Dakṣa's sacrifice: *Bhāgavata* (4.1-7), *Kālikā Purāṇa* (chapters 8-18) and other sacred works describe the sacrifice with some variations. Dakṣa had invited all the other gods to the sacrifice he performed; but he did not invite either Śiva or Satī. Unable to bear the insult meted out to her husband, Satī went to the sacrifice uninvited, and when her father insulted her husband further, she gave up her body in anger. Supremely enraged at Satī's death, Śiva destroyed the sacrifice of Dakṣa, and roamed about carrying the body of Satī on his shoulders. Not knowing how to appease Śiva's terrible anger, Brahmā, Viṣṇu (a Vedic deity who is well known as the protector of everything as the *Rg Veda*, 5.46 declares, for instance) and others cut Satī's body into pieces and made them fall on different parts of the earth. This created 51 spiritual centres, which are famous and vibrant with spirituality even today.

This story tells us that after creation comes preservation, and when the preservation-power goes, there's destruction. Thus in order for the cycle to be complete, there must be creation and then preservation and then destruction.

It will all not end with destruction; there will be creation once again. Going back to the Purāṇas, Menakā was Satī's friend during her days with Śiva. Menakā was deeply interested in having the Divine Mother as her daughter. So she would perform severe penances in the Himalayas. In order to fulfil her wish, the Divine Mother was born as her daughter after

the Satī episode.⁹ Her name was Umā, also called Haimavatī because she was Himavān's daughter, and Gaurī because of her fair complexion. So Aditi was born again!

The Vedas substantiate this Purāṇic story. About Umā, the *Kenopanishad* has a remarkable story. Once, Indra and other gods became proud that they had defeated enemies, but it was Brahman who had fought for them. In order to test their prowess, Brahman appeared before them as a *yakṣa*. The gods Agni and Vāyu went and failed not only to recognize him but also to pass the little test he put them to. Finally, when the king of the gods, Indra, himself went, Brahman disappeared. Indra is known for his pride, and at least two such instances can be cited: two hymns of the *Rg Veda* (10.48 and 49) show how proud Indra was. But the Mother is compassionate. Therefore, though Brahman did not show himself, in his place stood the brilliant (*bahu-śobhamānā*) Umā, the Mother Divine. She told Indra that it was Brahman himself who had appeared before them. Umā, therefore, revealed Brahman-knowledge for the first time to creation. So she is the personification of *brahmajñāna*. Sāyaṇa writes in his commentary on this subject: 'Since the daughter of Himavat, Gaurī, is the revealer of Brahman-knowledge, the term Gaurī or Umā implies *brahmavidyā*.'¹⁰ It is this Umā who is worshipped as Durgā! Durgā worship is thus the worship of knowledge. And Durgā destroys not just the demon but ignorance also!

Scholars quote the *Brhad-devatā*, a text of supreme importance. They say there are several places in it where Aditi has been equated with Durgā. Especially, a verse (2.77) of the *Brhad-devatā* clearly states that Aditi is Durgā.

9. दक्षगेहे समुद्भूता या सती लोकविश्रुता
कुपित्वा दक्ष राजर्षी सती त्यक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।
अनुगृह्य च मेनायां जाता तस्यास्तु सा तदा
काली नाम्नीति विख्याता सर्वशास्त्र प्रतिष्ठिता ॥

—*Nārada Pañcarātra*, 3.3.

10. हिमवत्पुत्र्या गौर्या ब्रह्मविद्याभिमानी रूपत्वात् गौरीवाचक
उमाशब्दो ब्रह्मविद्यां उपलक्षयति ।

From Creatrix to Destroyer of Evil

Thus we see that Aditi, the supreme mother of all, became Satī first, and Umā later. But how did she acquire the name Durgā? By bestowing supreme knowledge, Umā destroys our misery born of ignorance. Misery is called *duḥkha* in Sanskrit. The derivative meaning of the word 'Durgā' is, '*durduḥkhena gamyate*'. And she is '*durgārti-nāśini*'. Therefore Umā is Durgā.

There are several other reasons for her name being Durgā, given in the *Devī Bhāgavata*, *Durgā-saptāśati*, as well as in other places. The *Durgā-saptāśati* reasons are: since the Divine Mother killed the demon by name Durgama;¹¹ since she is like a ship that sails us safely through the impossible-to-cross ocean of *samsāra* (*durgāsi durga-bhava-sāgara naurasaṅgā*);¹² and since she rescues us from all difficulties (*durgāyai, durga-pārāyai*) she is called Durgā.¹³ According to the *Devī Purāṇa*, she who removes fear from the heart of one who thinks of her when confronted by enemies is called Durgā.¹⁴ Again, the commonly known idea is that since she as the destroyer of fate (*durgatī*) is called Durgā.

Aditi, we saw, is the creatrix of the universe, the mother of the gods. But is she known as the destroyer of evil and ignorance also, as Durgā is famed to be? Oh yes, she is! The Vedas declare repeatedly that Aditi is the protector of all. Sage Vasiṣṭha prays to Aditi thus: 'O Mother Aditi, please see that the gods Varuṇa, Mitra and Aryamā, who hold the returns of our sacrifices in their hands, do not become hurdles to us; so protect us from sins.'¹⁵ Again, another sage declares: 'O Goddess Aditi! You are loved in all the worlds. If you protect us, none can harm us. Please come to us along with the brilliant gods.' And 'Aditi knows to differentiate between friends and

foes. ... May Aditi protect our wealth day and night. ... May Aditi come to us. May she bestow peace and happiness to us; may she destroy our enemies.'¹⁶ Thus Aditi becomes Durgā, and her qualities of destroying enemies, creating the universe, and preserving life are all manifested fully in Durgā. So Durgā is very clearly a Vedic goddess and has a history of tens of thousands of years. While Vedic sages and others adored Aditi through prayers and hymns and sacrifices, Lord Kṛṣṇa himself is said to be the first to worship her in the Durgā form, next Brahmā, next Śiva, next Dharmarāja, etc!¹⁷ Whenever the gods had trouble, they would resort to Durgā. So Durgā worship has a glorious tradition.

However, there's another difficulty. While Vedic Aditi is not known to possess weapons, wherefrom did Durgā get her present form? In the Purāṇas we have Prajāpati praying fervently to the Divine Mother, who as *yoganidrā* had put the protector of the universe, Viṣṇu, to sleep. The need for waking him was, two wicked demons, Madhu and Kaitābha, along with Mahiṣa and others of extraordinary power, had to be destroyed. Viṣṇu woke up and killed the first two demons after great difficulty. When he heard of the third, Mahiṣa, he was enraged, and out of his anger came out a great power. Similarly, powers came out of all the other gods. The powers combined to become the Divine Mother (as she is their soul), and was given the best weapons by the gods. The Divine Mother routed Mahiṣa and his army, and disappeared. It was this Divine Mother who saved the gods as Gaurī once again.¹⁸

How Gaurī or Umā became involved in saving the gods is told in *Durgā Saptāśati* in detail. When two other demons by name

11. *Durgā Saptāśati*, 11.50.

12. *Ibid.*, 4.12.

13. *Ibid.*, 5.10.

14. Cf. *Devī Purāṇa*, Chapter 37.

15. *Rg Veda*, 7.40.4.

16. *Rg Veda*, 8.18.4-7.

17. प्रथमे पूजिता सा च कृष्णेन परमात्मना ।

मधुकैटभभीतेन ब्रह्मणा सा द्वितीयतः ।

त्रिपुरप्रेषितेनैव तृतीये त्रिपुरारिणा ॥

—*Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa*

18. *Durgā Saptāśati*, 4.41.

Śumbha and Niśumbha began troubling the gods, they resorted to the Himalayas and prayed to Gaurī or Pārvatī. She killed all the demons, saved the gods, and assumed several names like Cāmuṇḍā (for having killed the demons Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa) etc.

This is the story of Aditi's becoming Durgā.

The Reason for Durgā Worship

We saw how Aditi, the mother of all the gods and all the worlds, became transformed into Durgā. We also saw that Durgā destroyed the terrible enemies of the gods. But why do we worship Durgā now also?

Durgā is worshipped because she is the source of everything, and represents the Supreme in this divine form. Moreover, by worshipping her, all the gods and goddesses are worshipped, because, for instance, Durgā is the goddess of learning. The *Bṛhad-devatā* (2.76) says that Aditi, Vāk and Sarasvatī are one and the same. Again, Durgā is the goddess of wealth, Lakṣmī. The *R̥g Veda* says that Aditi is *sarvamaṅgalā*; and the *Atharva Veda* says that Aditi is *saṃrddhi dāyini*.¹⁹ And Durgā is Kālī also. Scholars quote the *Kubjikā Tantra* and say that even though she is fair and golden in complexion, Durgā assumed the dark colour in this Kaliyuga.²⁰ The *Mahābhārata* (1.1.209-10) says that it is Kāla or Time who creates, preserves and destroys everything. This Kāla is the other name of Śiva. Śiva's wife is Pārvatī or Durgā. So she is called Kālī, and hence the creatrix, preserver and destroyer of the universe. In this way, Durgā is the Universal Mother. To worship her is to worship everything and everyone and all powers. Yet we see that others deities too are worshipped along with her.

Above all, Durgā is the personification of supreme knowledge. By symbolically killing the dark demon Mahiṣa who represents igno-

rance or *tamas*, she reveals that she is the bestower of divine knowledge that liberates. She destroys evil in us and bestows all good. She is the deliverer of souls.

By worshipping her, Mother Durgā bestows everything: as Lakṣmī she bestows wealth, prosperity, etc; as Sarasvatī she bestows intelligence, spiritual brilliance, etc. As Durgā herself, she bestows liberation. So by worshipping Durgā, we attain everything—all the four *puruṣārthas* or goals of human life—religion (*dharma*), material prosperity (*artha*), enjoyment (*kāma*) and liberation from suffering and bondage (*mokṣa*).²¹

Such being the glory of Durgā, we could worship her anytime. But why is she specially worshipped during this autumnal season? Why especially in *śarat-kāla* or autumn?

Apart from some known reasons (see p. 500, for instance), one reason given is this one:

One of the innumerable names of Durgā is Ambikā. The Bengali *Viśvakośa* says that the first ever mention of Ambikā is in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1.6.10.4), where Ambikā is called Rudra's sister owing to her mercilessness towards the wicked. The *Viśvakośa* also quotes the commentator of this *Brāhmaṇa*, Mahidhara, that Ambikā assumes the form of *śarat* or autumn and kills the enemies by way of creating diseases.¹⁷ The terrible forms of Ambikā and Rudra, says Mahidhara, are pacified by sacrifices and offering of oblations. It implies that Durgā is most active during the autumnal season, destroying evil. Her worship, done at this time, will naturally be propitious. In any case, the popular belief is that Durgā is easily pleased by the devotee's call, and she is ready to protect us always. So to worship her is our greatest good fortune. Let's worship her to our heart's content. □

19. *Atharva Veda*, 7.6.4.

20. कलौ कृष्णत्वमासाद्य शुक्लाऽपि नीलरूपिणी ।
लीलया वाक्पदादेति तेन नीलसरस्वती ॥

—*Kubjikā Tantra*, *paṭala* 1.

21. दुःखदारिद्र्य नाशाय संग्रामे विजयाय च ।

क्रूरशत्रुविनाशार्थं तथोग्रकर्मसाधने ।

दुर्गाञ्च पूजयेद्भक्त्या परलोकसुखाय च ॥

—*Devī Bhāgavata*, 3.26.50-1.

22. सा च अम्बिका शरदूपं प्राप्य जरादिकं उत्पाद्य विरोधिनां हन्ति ।

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Ideal Wife

Jayamati's sacrifice can't be measured. When the king of Assam, Chakradhwaj Singh, passed away in 1670, there was anarchy. There were as many as six rulers between 1670 and 1679! One killed the other and ascended the throne. Finally, a person by name Chulikfa from the Chamguriya dynasty was made king. He was an incarnation of weakness—both physically and mentally. He was called Larā Rājā or 'child king' owing to his premature age and sickly appearance. The weak alone sin. And the king sinned. He was scared that his ministers might conspire and dethrone him. So he targeted all the prospective kings and began wiping them out one by one. His wickedness grew day by day. Now there was a young hero by name Gadāpāni, who belonged to the Tungakhungiya clan. He was so strong that once he had restrained a mad elephant by holding its tusks. Larā Rājā came to know about Gadāpāni and sent his henchmen to kill him. Jayamati was Gadāpāni's wife. She sensed something wrong and requested her husband to go into hiding. Gadāpāni laughed her fears away. He said he wasn't afraid of dying. But Jayamati wept and repeatedly prayed in the name of their little kids, Lai and Lechai, to escape imminent death. So Gadāpāni agreed to hide somewhere. The king's people came in search of him. Jayamati told them she did not know where her husband was. When Larā Rājā heard this, he became all the more nervous and suspicious; his weak mind imagined Gadāpāni coming with a huge army to kill him. He immediately ordered his men to bring Jayamati, tie her to a post in the centre of the town, and beat her until she disclosed her husband's whereabouts. The order was executed within hours and, even as hundreds of people saw helplessly, soldiers beat Jayamati with sticks. However much they beat her, she never said anything. Not one or two, but several days passed in this way! Gadāpāni was furious to hear that his wife was being tortured. He came in the guise of an old farmer to where his wife was, and said in a muffled tone: 'O lady! Why are you suffering in this way? Why not tell where your husband is!' Jayamati instantly recognized her husband. Even in her extreme pain she was worried: if her husband showed up, all her troubles would go in vain. So she said: 'Who's this old farmer saying this to me? I shall never disclose anything. A true wife will give up her life for the good of her husband. She will endure everything for her husband's sake. Go, go.' While saying this, she cast her pleading, bloodshot eyes at Gadāpāni. Gadāpāni instantly realized that he must somehow survive in order that her noble sacrifice may bear fruit. So he went away in tears. At last, unable to bear the pain, Jayamati passed away after 16 days' torture. This was too much for Gadāpāni. He strove hard to raise an army, and attacked Larā Rājā. The wicked king was killed. Gadāpāni assumed the name Gadādhār Singh and ascended the throne in 1681. He ruled over Assam very nobly for about 14 years and passed on in 1695. His eldest son, Lai, became king in 1695 assuming the name Rudra Singh. Rudra Singh became the most popular king of Assam. In order to keep his mother's memory intact, Rudra had a huge canal dug at the exact place where Jayamati was tortured, and called it Jaya Sāgar. Along with that, he also built a beautiful temple called Jaydol which is in Sibsagar district.

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Swami Smarananandaji is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited the Ramakrishna Order's centres in America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs. This is the ninth in the series.

BOSTON AND PROVIDENCE

On the morning of 20 June 2000 Swami Atmarupananda took Dr Gour Das and myself to Boston by road. The scenic beauty of the

Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and some others were described as 'New England Brahmins.' Even now Boston has many universities and colleges, and the Boston University occupies



Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston

road, with the thickly wooded Appalachian Mountains in the background, is enchanting. We reached the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, by 12:45 pm. Boston is the capital of the state of Massachusetts. This northeast area of the USA is known as New England. The earliest settlements from Europe were on the East Coast. New England was considered the home of the intellectuals of the United States. During the last century, Emerson,

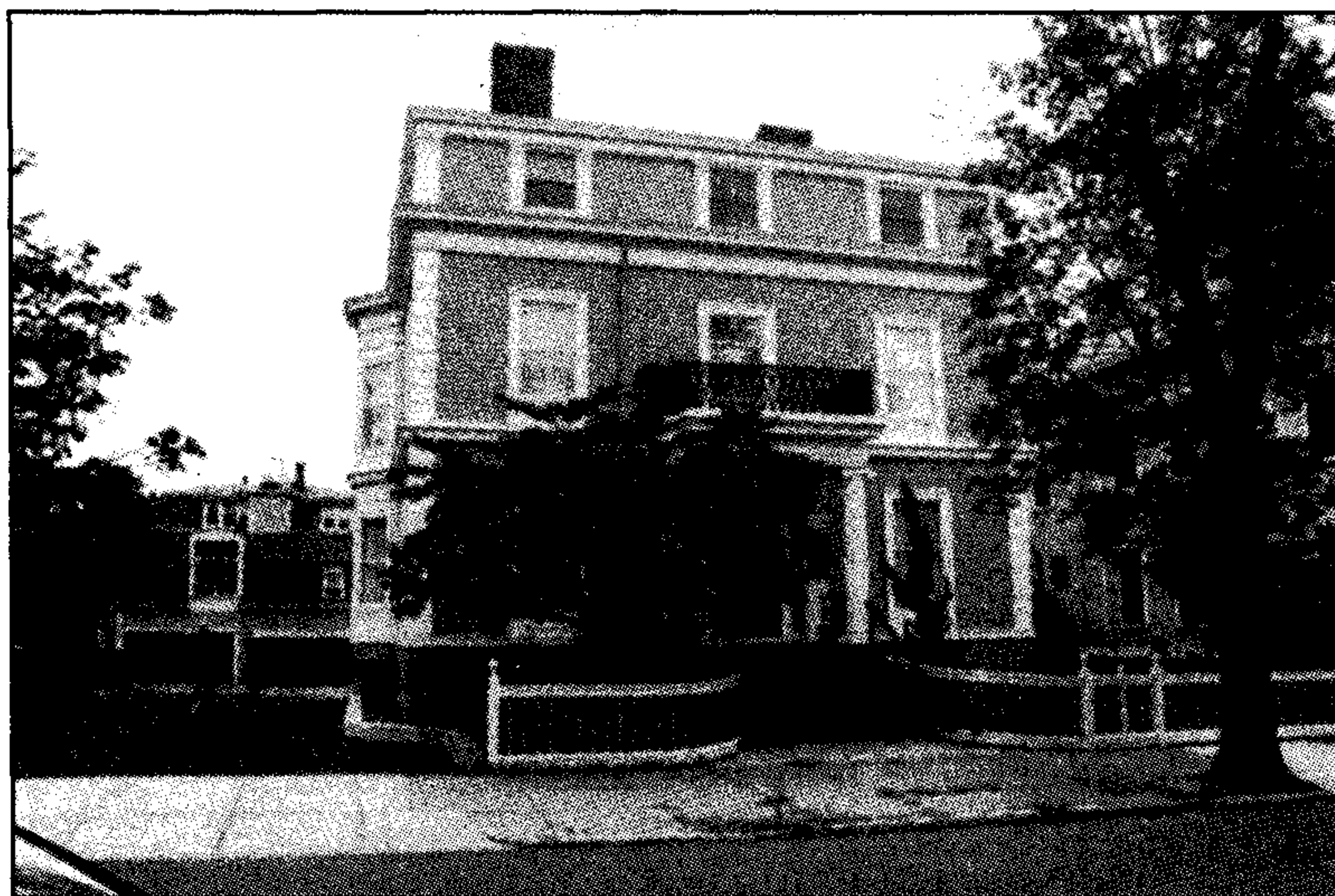
half the city's area. Across the Charles River in Cambridge are the famous Harvard University and the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Swami Sarvagatananda (87) is the head of both Boston and Providence centres since Swami Akhilananda, their founder, passed away in 1962. Swami Tyagananda, a young swami, has joined him as an assistant three years back. He is being invited by important academic bodies for giving classes.

On 21st, Mr Chiranjeeb Sarkar drove us — Swamis Sarvagatananda and Tyagananda, Dr Gour Das, and myself — to Vedanta Society of Providence.

It took just 75 minutes to reach the place. This Society was started in 1928. Recently, the Society has sold its old building and built a new one opposite the earlier one. This new building is quite nice. In the afternoon, we went for an outing to Newport on the Atlantic coast—quite a pleasant spot.

Providence is the capital of the state of Rhode Island, the smallest state in the USA. It is a county, smaller than Boston. Once upon a



Vedanta Society, Providence

time there were some industries here. The Brown University occupies a big area of this city.

It was a restful day on 22 June. In the afternoon, I went to Lincoln Woods, a scenic place with thick forest and a lake, and to University Heights, from where you get a good view of the city.

Next morning, Swami Sarvagatananda had arranged for an early breakfast and a brief early lunch so that we could go at 11 am to see the American Everest expedition on the IMAX screen. The show began at 12:00 noon and went on for 50 minutes. It was an awe-inspiring spectacle—meeting the Himalayan challenge of nature and climbing the highest peak in the world. We returned to Boston in the afternoon. After tea and snacks, I left with Swami Tyagananda for Cambridge, which is across the river, to see a bit of the famous Harvard University and the MIT, again driven by Chiranjeeb Sarkar. We saw the room at Harvard where Swami Vivekananda had spoken to eminent professors on 'Science and Spirituality'. We also saw Mrs Ole Bull's residence from the outside, for it is now occupied by someone not known to us. We then went to Marshfield, a place some 45 miles away,

where a summer retreat is maintained by the Boston centre. It is a 15-acre land with four cottages. Devotees come and stay in summer and spend some days in spiritual practice. We returned thence to Boston and went to see the place of the Boston Tea Party at Boston Harbour. The museum connected with this was closed by 6 pm and so we could not see it.

The Boston Tea Party is an important event in American history. On 16 December 1773, the Americans gave vent to their feeling against their colonial masters, the British, by



Katherine Abbot Sanborn

throwing a huge shipment of tea (342 chests) into the sea at Boston Harbour. This was because the British East India Company was having a monopoly in this trade and had also imposed taxes on tea. The British Government, in its turn, imposed punitive measures, resulting in the shutting off of Boston Port. All this drifted towards the war of independence.

After breakfast on the 24th, Swami Tyagananda and myself left for Annisquam, accompanied by Mr Wendell and Mrs Elva, both old-time devotees. Elva drove the car. In America, people are never too old to drive.

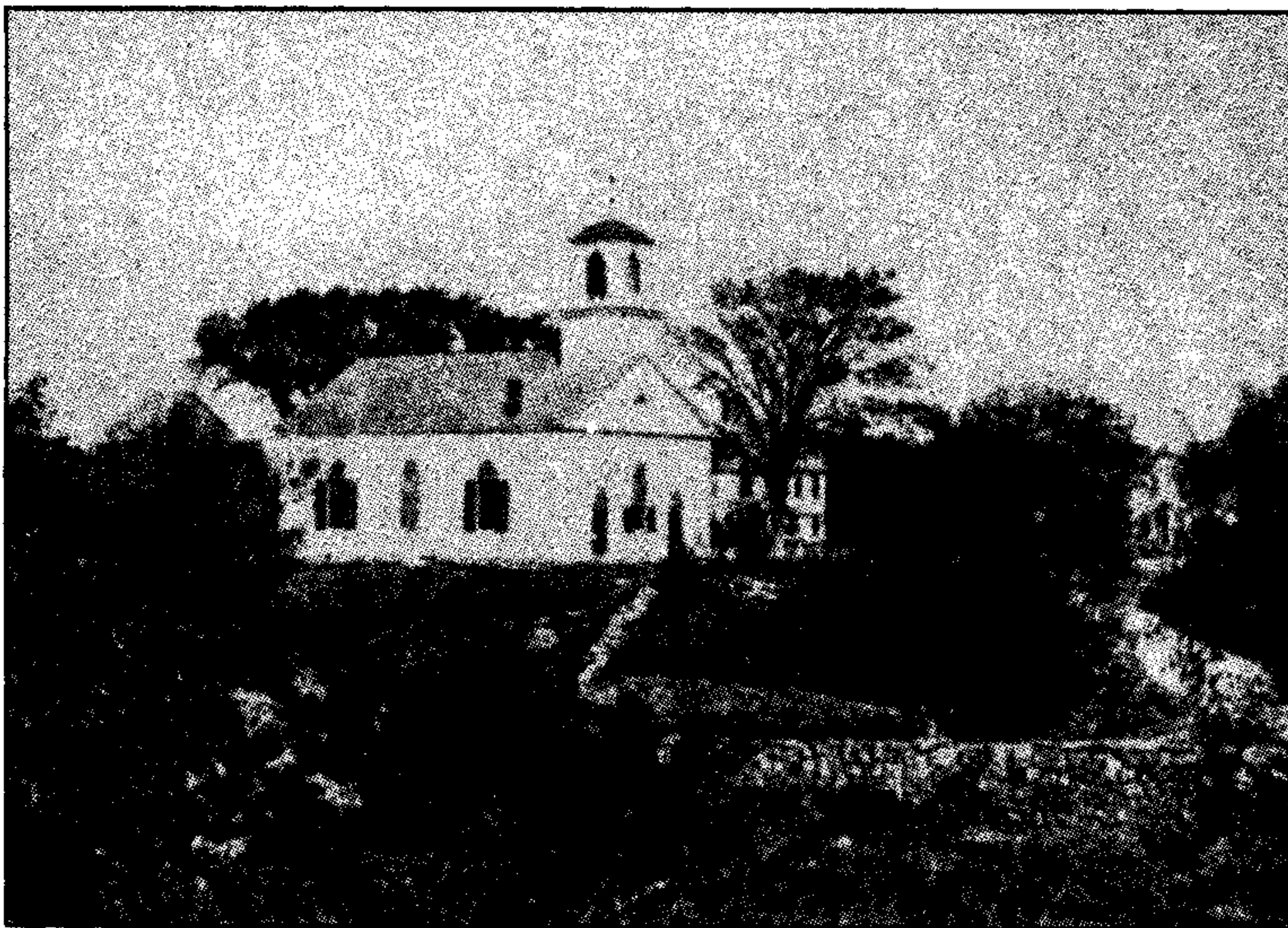
Annisquam was the place where Swami Vivekananda went from Chicago, well before the Parliament of Religions. He was the guest of a rich lady by name Miss Katherine Abbot Sanborn. It was here that Swami Vivekananda made his acquaintance with Prof Wright of the Harvard University, who wrote to the chairman of the committee for the selection of delegates for the Parliament of Religions at Chicago: 'Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.'



Prof John Henry Wright

Swami Vivekananda stayed in a boarding-house, which is now a residential house. We also visited the 200-year old Unitarian Church, where Swami Vivekananda spoke. The people at the church were quite cordial, and were happy to meet us.

On Sunday, the 25th, I spoke at 11 am on 'Sri Ramakrishna and His Message'. We had to leave for Providence by 3 pm. Reaching Providence at 4 pm, I spoke again at 5 on the same subject. Thus, my visit to New England came to an end.



Universalist Church, Annisquam, where Swami Vivekananda gave a lecture

(to be continued)

What I Owe to the *Bhagavadgītā*

REV ANTHONY ELENGIMITTAM

Reverend Anthony Elengimittam is an octogenarian monk. He has many books on philosophy and practical religion to his credit. A student of several religious methodologies, Rev Elengimittam is the founder of a meditation centre in Italy.

Having completed the 86th birthday of my body, as I look back to all those that have helped me to reach the present state of mental peace and serenity—the *Bhagavadgītā*, the gospel of Sri Krishna, stands out as the foremost friend and teacher of my life, the culminating holy scripture, which served me as God's instrument to understand the mysteries implicit in life; it's a mariner's compass which enabled me to cross over the sea of life. As God is pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, *sat-cit-ānanda*, the entire phenomenal world, entirely and wholly, depends on Him. Not a leaf from the tree falls without God's will. 'But the very hairs of your head are all numbered,' says Jesus (*St Matthew*, 10.30).

I have loved all historical religions. All the scriptural texts of all the religions are mine. I read, study, and meditate upon the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Granth Sahib* of the Sikhs, the *Tao-te-Ching* of the Chinese and all other religious scriptures. Yet the one single scriptural text which has guided and helped me in my spiritual growth is undoubtedly the *Bhagavadgītā*, those eighteen chapters from the 'Bhīṣma Parva' of *Mahābhārata*. While I owe my debt to all religious scriptures, I must confess that the *Gītā* has helped me more than all other scriptures, including the New Testament of the Christians and the *Dhammapada* of the Buddhists. Although I belong to all religions of this earthly planet, the debt of gratitude that I owe to the religious philosophy of the ancient Indo-Aryans, as recorded in the

Vedas and the Vedic culture, and the six classical systems of Indian philosophy, notably the Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Vedānta, is immense because they fully satisfy the rational, scientific and spiritual needs of my aspiring soul.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: 'My life has been a series of external tragedies. If these have not left any visible trace on me, it is due to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*.' When Providence provided me with the singular grace of being able to work with Mahatma Gandhi in Noakhali in the year 1946, I could verify the truth of the above statement of the Mahatma.

With a view to counteracting the immense tragedy of growing violence, sensuality and spiritual ignorance in our human family it is imperative to train up millions of apostles of peace, purity and selfless service on the basis of the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Spiritual ignorance or *avidyā* is the root cause of all our miseries and sufferings. Hoping against hope, let all spiritual forces and monastic organizations join hands in training up monks and nuns in their thousands, who will do the job of enlightening the members of our human family. The 'Song of the Sannyasin' of our Swami Vivekananda should be the international anthem while embarking upon the task of self-enlightenment and world-reconstruction on the basis of the philosophy, ethics, psychology and Self-realizing dynamics, as taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is the innermost core of all religions and philosophies of world history. □

Novena and Navarātri

RAMACHANDRA KRISHNA PRABHU

This month, the joyous festival of Navarātri will be celebrated all over India and abroad. We reprint an article from the September 1964 number of the Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda, in which Ramachandra Prabhu gives a masterly comparative account of Navarātri in other cultures. Novena isn't observed now though it's historically important.

The Roman Catholic Church has long recognized a feast called Novena as one that can be legitimately observed by its followers. *Novena* is a Latin word, the plural of *novenus*, which means 'consisting of nine.' According to the *Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, Novena is 'a prayer for some special object or occasion, extended over a period of nine days.' It may be carried on in common in church, but is often a private affair. A number of Novenas, chiefly in preparation for various feasts, have been approved by the Holy See. In its earliest form, Novena of mourning for a deceased person was common in early Christianity. Various



The Delphic Sibyl:
Questions were given in writing
and the priestess would answer them

contributory causes are alleged for the choice of nine days, but the number seems to have been taken over from Roman paganism.

In

Rome at least, if not also in other parts of Italy, Novena has been a regular feature of the festivities connected with the celebration of Christmas. On the nine consecutive days preceding Christmas, special prayers are recited by the faithful, both in the churches and/or in their homes, for obtaining, through the intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of a particular saint, some special blessing or mercy. Since the 'pagan', ie Roman, origin of this nine-day-long observance is frankly admitted even in orthodox Catholic circles, it would be worthwhile to look into the original source of the festival. Indeed, the very name Novena appears to have been borrowed from the Roman festival called Novena, which was spread over nine days and which formed an integral part of the Megalesia festivals that were being widely celebrated in Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire. The story of the origin of these Megalesia festivals may be briefly narrated here.

In 204 BC, in accordance with a Sibylline Oracle, which had previously prophesied that the presence of the Phrygian goddess Magna Mater Idaea, who was also known as Cybele, alone would drive the enemy, namely, the Phoenician army led by Hannibal that had invaded Italy out of the country, the stone image of the goddess was brought to Rome from Phrygia. Miraculously enough, Hannibal with his army was forced to leave the country within a year and, in gratitude, the people of Rome under Emperor Claudius had the image of the goddess installed in the temple of vic-



The worship of Mother Durgā

tory on the palatine on 4 April and the day was proclaimed a festival day in her honour.

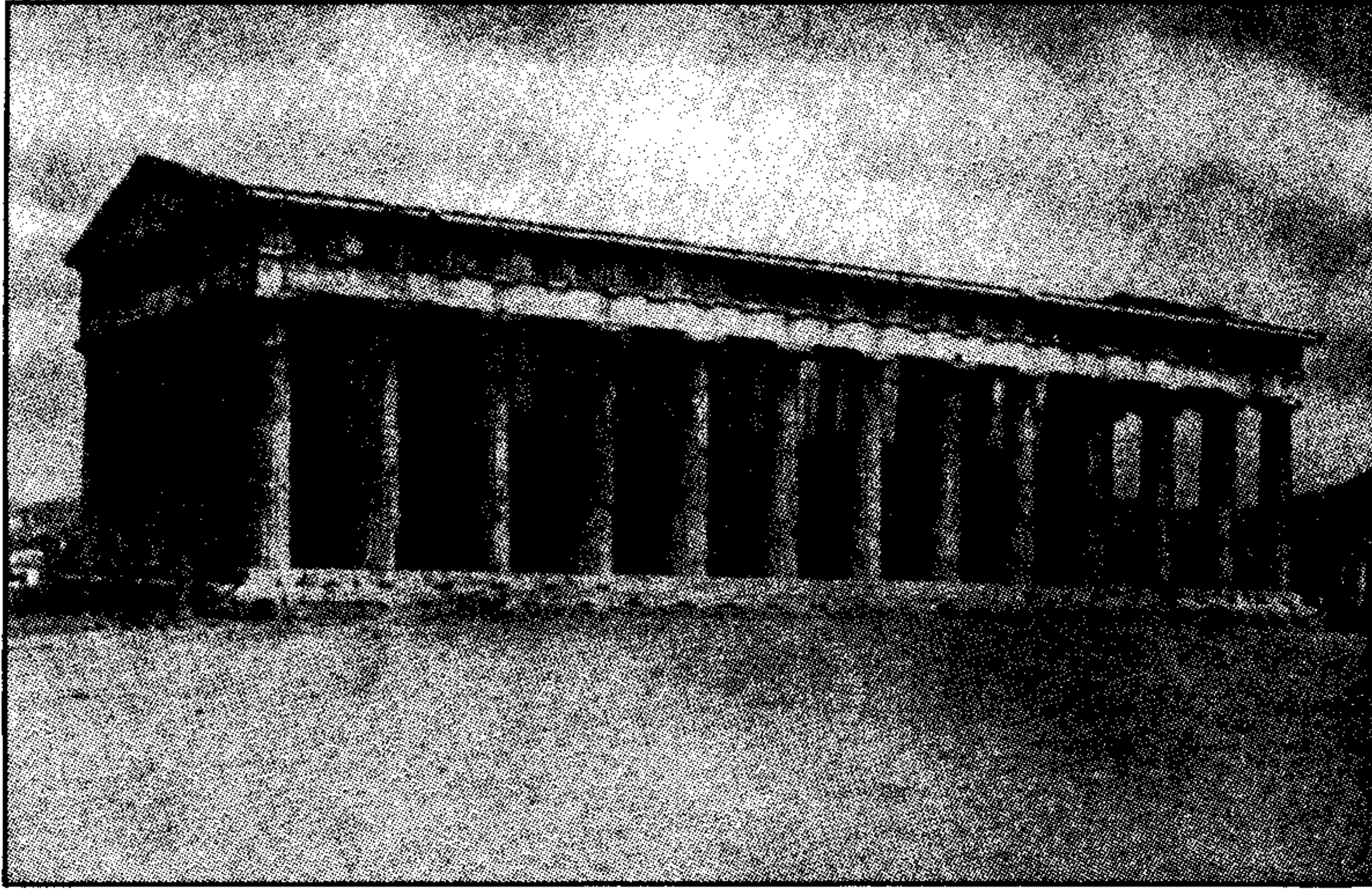
In accordance, probably, with the custom prevailing in Phrygia, from where the goddess came, Megalesia or Festivals of the Magna Mater Cybele were instituted in Rome. March was the first month of the Roman year and the festivals of the goddess began on 15 March with Canna Intrato ('Day of Reeds'), when the guild of Cannophorii, mostly children, entered the temple in memory of the reeds among which the infant sun-god Attis, the lover of Cybele, had been exposed. Then followed a Novena or a fast of nine days, during which the faithful had to observe strict continence and abstain from bread and everything made from cereals, roots, pomegranates, dates, quinces, pork, fish and wine. On the 22nd came Arbor Intrat, when the Dendrophorii or guild of tree-bearers cut a young pine tree in the woods sacred to Cybele and brought it in procession, along with a

small image of Attis attached to the top branches, to the temple of the goddess, chanting funeral hymns as a sign of grief. Worshipers sat round this tree and mourned the death of Attis day and night. On the 24th, the mourning reached its height on the Dies Sanguinis or Day of Blood, when the priests cut and lashed themselves with scourges so as to sprinkle the tree with their blood. The 25th was Hilaria or Day of Joy, as the resurrection of Attis was declared to have taken place at midnight. After the dawn the marriage procession of Attis and Cybele was taken out, with the faithful crying 'Attis is risen.'¹

The Hindus in India have been observing a festival called Navarātri for more than a thousand years which, besides being a nine-day festival like the Megalesian Novena, offers such an astonishing parallel to the latter in its details that one is led to wonder whether the two festivals might not have originated, in their remotest past, from a common source. The Navarātri (lit. 'nine nights'), which is celebrated throughout India for a period of nine days in autumn, is followed like the Novena of Cybele by a day of joy and hilarity, which goes by the name of Vijaya Daśamī or Dasara.

The Navarātri festival is held in honour of the great mother goddess Durgā and begins on the first day of the bright half of the lunar month of Āśvina (September-October), which will be the 16th day of the month, if the month is calculated from full moon to full moon. It will be noticed that the Novena of Megalesia also began on the 16th day. The Saptamī or the seventh day of the fortnight, which would be the 22nd day of the month, is observed as the goddess's *patrikā-praveśa* or entry into a bower of leaves from nine plants. It will be again noticed that the 22nd day in the Novena of Megalesia was Arbor Intrat, when a tree was cut in the wood sacred to Cybele and carried to her temple in procession. The Navamī or

1. W.W. Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of The Republic* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1899), p. 69. [Hereafter, *Roman Festivals*.]



The Temple of Theseus: Perhaps the oldest but the best-preserved temple of Greece

ninth day, which would be the 24th day of the month, sees the end of Navarātri, as did the Novena too end on the 24th day. All through the nine days and nights of the Navarātri, as in the case of the Novena, strict chastity and abstinence from flesh food and other prescribed articles of diet, including wine, are enjoined on the worshippers.

The 10th day, Daśamī, which would be the 25th day of the month, is the day of Vijayā (or Bijoyā as it is called in Bengal), being the day of final victory of Durgā over the forces of evil and darkness represented by the demons Mahiṣāsurā ('buffalo-demon'), Śumbha Niśumbha, and so on. The 10th day is also celebrated all over India as Dasara or the day of the victory of Rāma, the divine hero of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, over the ten-headed demon Rāvaṇa, and also the day when the Pāṇḍavas, the heroic princes of the epic *Mahābhārata* who had been in exile, recovered their arms from the śamī tree on which they had been kept before exile.

Though the Navarātri is being celebrated in most parts of the country at the present day as an autumnal festival, there is sufficient evidence to show that originally it was a spring-time festival. In Bengal, in the spring month of

Caitra this festival is being celebrated to this day by some under the name of Vāsanti Pūjā, while the larger majority of Bengalis celebrate the Durgā Pūjā in autumn. In southern India too the Tamilians, who follow the solar calendar, celebrate the Navarātri in spring, not in honour of Durgā, but of Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning. How the springtime nine-day festival

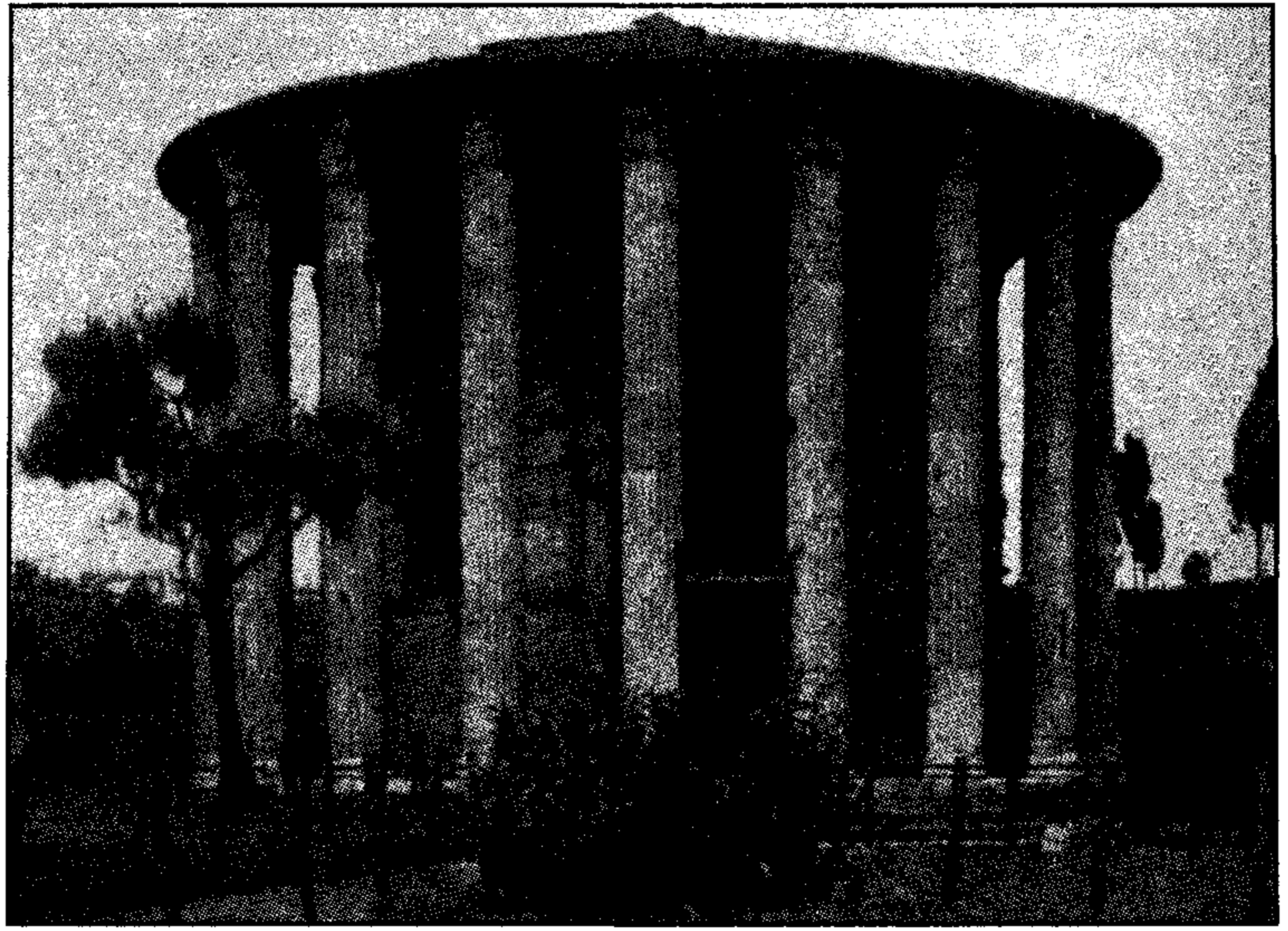
came to be celebrated in autumn is told in some of the religious books, mostly of tantric origin, wherein it is stated that the epic hero Rāma, finding himself baffled in his fight with the demon Rāvaṇa, invoked the sleeping goddess Durgā for help, though it was autumn then, and that the goddess thus roused bestowed supernatural arms on Rāma with which to destroy the demon.

But there is a more valid reason why the spring festival of old should have come to be celebrated in autumn now. The zodiacal belt of constellations and along with it the months which are named after the constellations make a complete circuit of the heavens in the course of about 25,860 years. If the Arctic Home, where the annual sunrise was preceded by a dawn of 24 days' duration, existed some 12,000 years ago, the constellations and the months to which they were allied in popular imagination would have made nearly half the circuit of the heavens, and what were spring constellations and months 12,000 years ago would be autumnal constellations and months now, and the festivals which are bound up with the constellations and months too would suffer a similar shift from spring to

autumn. Navarātri is not the only festival which has undergone a seasonal change, and Hindus are not the only people whose racial festivals have shifted from springtime to autumn.

It may be mentioned in this connection that according to Jaina traditions the worship of Aparājitādevī, also called Ambikā, which is one of the names of Durgā, has to take place on Mahānavamī day. The well-known Jaina author Somadeva in his work *Yaśastilaka* testifies to this fact. Śrutasāgara, a commentator on this work, defines Mahānavamī as the ninth day of Śukla Caitra. Another Jaina writer, Udayavira, in his *Pārśvanātha Carita*, assigns both Caitra and Āśvina Śukla-pakṣas to Mahānavamī, which indicates the prevalence in his days of divergent traditions, one assigning the festival to the spring season and the other to autumn.

For the real origins of the Navarātri, we have to go back to the nine-nights ritual which formed part of the 10-nights ritual, named Daśarātra, of the Vedic sacrificial session known as Gavām Ayana. Daśarātra extended over the last 10 days of this session which appears to have commenced on the first day of the long-drawn period of 24 days' duration and to have terminated on the 25th day when the sun put in his appearance after several months of darkness and gloom. The last day of Daśarātra, which was a 25th day, coincided with the Mahāvrata day, which was also a 25th day, and was called as such, Pañcaviṃśa. This 25th day, which saw the rebirth of the sun-god, was the New Year's Day of the polar year.



The Temple of Vesta: The sacred fire was kept perpetually burning in this temple

From all the above mentioned facts it would not be unreasonable to conclude that (a) the 10th day following the Navarātri, which is known as Vijayā Daśamī and which saw the triumph of Durgā and Rāma over the demoniac forces, (b) the 10th day following the Megalesian Novena, known among the Romans as Hilaria, which saw the resurrection of the sun-god Attis, and (c) the 10th or concluding day of the Daśarātra or the 10-day period of Gavām Ayana which was identical with the Mahāvrata and which saw the rebirth of the sun-god Prajāpati, must have all had a common source, to wit, the phenomenon of the reappearance of the sun-god on the spring horizon on the day following the termination of a continuous dawn of 24 days' duration, in the prehistoric Arctic Home of humanity.

The Phrygians, according to Dr H.R. Hall,² were a people speaking the 'Aryan' tongue, and hence it is not to be wondered at that they should have inherited the traditions of life in the circumpolar regions in the hoary past. The ancient Romans and Greeks too can be shown to have preserved traditions of a

2. *Ancient History of the Near East* (1913), p. 476.

similar nature. For instance, the circumambulating of the polar dawn continuously for 24 days might have furnished a remote background for the ceremonies of the New Year's Day, 1st of March, in Rome. On this day the sacred fire of the Vesta was renewed and fresh laurels fixed on the Regia. This was also the day in which the shields were taken by the Salii, who were 24 in number, from the *sanc-tum martis* in the Regia and carried through the city in procession.

These processions continued till the 24th of the month. The Salii leaped and danced, continuously striking the shields with a short spear or stick, as they sang their ancient hymns and performed their rhythmic dance. Again, on 17 March, which was named Agonia, a procession went to the Argei, sacred places 24 in number.³

Reminding one of the nine-day festival of the mother goddess Cybele was the Greek festival of Thesmophoria, which was held in autumn, and which was celebrated by women alone. It was also a nine-day affair, and represented with mourning rites the descent of Persephone (or Demeter) into the lower world and her return from the dead. During these nine days women were required to observe strict chastity (*Ovid. Met.*, X. 439). The Karncia, and the festivals known as Agogia and Katagogia of Aphrodite were also carried on

for nine days. It began with laments, but concluded with expression of joy and gladness.⁴

Chief among the Peruvian festivals was that of the winter solstice which lasted nine days. On the morning of the next day the emperor himself officiated as high priest and all the people gathered at dawn in the public square to await the coming of the supreme deity, the sun. At sight of him great shouts of joy rose from the multitude, who threw kisses to

the orb of the day and prostrated themselves.⁵

Lastly, the Zoroastrian priestly class observe to this day a purification ceremony, called Barashnom of Nine Nights, which lasts for nine days or rather nights. A detailed description of this ceremony has been given in the ninth *fargard* of the *Vendidad*. According to Dr Martin Haug,⁶ it is intended for the removal of any impurity whatever, and is practised chiefly by priests. Describing the ceremony,

Dr Haug adds: 'The

person who has to undergo the ceremony must drink the urine of a cow, sit on stones within the compass of certain magic circles, and while moving from one heap of stones to another he must rub his body with cow's urine, then with sand, and lastly wash it with water. This custom has descended from the most ancient times, when a purifying and healing influence was ascribed to the urine



Durgā

3. *Roman Festivals*, pp. 35-41.

4. W.T. Olcott, *Sun-lore of All Ages* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), p. 242.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

6. *Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings and Religion of the Parsis* (3rd edition), p. 241.

proceeding from so sacred an animal as the cow was to the ancient Aryans.' Dr Haug, in a footnote here, remarks that 'the cow's urine called *gomez* in the scripture was probably a metaphorical name for rainwater, originally the cows being clouds metaphorically.' Seeing that in ancient Vedic as well as Avestan terminology the word *go*, from which the word *gomez* is derived, signified not only a cow but also occasionally the sun's as well as dawn's rays, and that in the *R̥g Veda* at least the dawn is called *go* ('cow'), it may be that the cow's urine mentioned in connection with the Barashnom ceremony is meant to be symbolical of the sun's rays, to the purificatory nature of which, in both the physical and spiritual senses, the ancient Hindu and Zoroastrian scriptures bear ample testimony. Hence, the presumption that the nine nights' purification ceremony of the Zoroastrians might have had something to do with the nine nights' ritual, ie Navarātra of the Daśarātra period of the circumambulation of Long Dawn, the mother goddess, and the rebirth of the sun-god of the prehistoric Arctic Home of the Indo-Iranians, cannot be dismissed lightly. It must, however, remain an open question till the reality of that Home is established beyond doubt.

According to Prof Stephen Langdon and other European historians, the Sumerian civilization, which was perhaps the original source of the Cybele story, goes back to nearly 7000 BC. It therefore seems probable, says Prof Langdon, that 'the worship of Cybele, as our common Mother Earth, is not only the most

ancient but the most persistent religion known to civilized man.'

The association of lions and tigers with the ancient mother goddess appears to have been an almost invariable feature of the cults of these goddesses not only in the Middle East, but also in Europe, Egypt and India too. Cybele is shown in her sculptured representations as riding with her divine husband Attis in a car drawn by two lions. The Indian mother goddesses Durgā and Aparājītā too are shown as riding on lions. The Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian and Assyrian goddesses of antiquity, like Ishtar, Attargetis, Reha, Anaitis, Innina, Ge, Sokhmit and Sekhet are all depicted as either riding on a lion or as lion-headed or as having lions with them. Since the polar dawn goddess, who was viewed sometimes as the mother, at other times as the wife, and at still other times as the sister or daughter of the sun-god, was seen in the last stage of her circuits, careering round the horizon in the company of the stellar lion, which was lighted by her, it was but natural that this goddess should have been looked upon as riding on a lion. The substitution of tigers for lions as the associates of the goddesses in a few stray cases appears to have been due to the loss of the correct tradition which was polar in origin. Thus the antiquity of the cult of the mother goddess can be pushed right back to the age of the prehistoric Arctic Home of civilized humanity, which is at least as old as 10,000 BC when the spring equinox lay in the zodiacal sign of Leo, the Vedic Simha. □

Swami Ramakrishnananda on Renunciation

Why should a man give up? Why should he be unselfish? Rather let him be the most selfish man; let him not be satisfied with anything short of infinity. Let him not be content with the little finite things of this world. Let his ambitions be infinite. Let him only give up because he is going to get a great deal more. If anyone throws away one hundred rupees in the street, we call him a madman; but if he throws away one hundred rupees to get a hundred thousand, then we think him very sane. So let a man give up this world which can bring him only perishable happiness, in order to get God who can give him everlasting bliss.

'What's Your Opinion?'

Prabuddha Bharata conducted a sample survey regarding how the youth of some countries feel about Indian religion and spirituality. Here is the second and concluding instalment of their opinion.

Do you think your country needs Indian spiritual ideas, especially Vedantic ones, as taught by Swami Vivekananda?

ALIA GURTOV, USA

As I said in answer to the second question, if we had a more open mind towards new ideas, Americans could benefit much from Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda.

BITAN BHATTACHARYA, Bangladesh

In these days of conflicting values, our people have become more conscious of material gain. They hardly try to practise religion. A tiny group of people, however, aspire to attain spiritual enlightenment. In order to reach such a state, one needs to have recourse to Vedanta as taught by Swami Vivekananda. A few, who could be counted on fingertips, have started practising meditation, which is supposed to be the only way to absolute peace. I firmly believe that my country will be immensely benefited by the spiritual ideas of Vedanta philosophy because there is no way to salvation other than that.

CARLOS JAVIER D'ANGELO, Argentina

Yes, I do. Our country is actually suffering from a deep moral crisis. Most social values are being lowered. We are lacking clear human examples. We have the evil of great corruption in most affairs and deep social and economic crises too. Women and elders are not respected anymore as they used to be. The Argentine state has not given an image of authority to youngsters. On the contrary, they are showing them clear signs of corruption. That is why I believe that basic human values, which we find in Hindu philosophy and religion, would be essential to bring about a social change in the Argentine society. And for me

there is no better teaching for a society to follow than Swami Vivekananda's. Basing their efforts on Vedanta philosophy as preached by Swamiji, great patriots in India were able to make the changes which we can actually see in Hindu society. I firmly believe Swami Vivekananda's books should be recommended reading in our secondary institutions and universities so that the future generation may gain from his vast and deep knowledge.

CLAIRE GOODAL, UK

I do think that Indian spiritual ideas are needed here as they are universal, and teach the law of karma and reincarnation; and teach how our present life is a product of our past thoughts, feelings and deeds; and also teach how our thoughts, words and deeds affect our future lives. The Indian spiritual ideas also say that God comes in human form many times and that all paths are one and the same and that we are all one. Indian spirituality also teaches us to respect our parents, elders and teachers and to follow a dharmic life.

DANA SUGU, Romania

Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic ideas are the very essence of life. Unless we learn how to awaken the perfection already existent in us, to take off the cover of the soul and to discover that mine of knowledge already in us, we live as if already dead. Swami Vivekananda's key words are hope, trust, love, liberty, positive thinking, faith, confidence, boldness, service, concentration, meditation, and chastity. If we learn how to apply each of them in our life, if we start standing on

our own feet, facing life as it is, not blaming anyone for our mistakes, but blessing the misery for making us stronger, then we are really ready to become 'the children' of the Almighty, sparks of the infinite, divine fire. By knowing this, we can train ourselves in the use of our minds and greatly enhance our powers of imagination, modes of thinking, approaches to understanding, and comprehending of the Reality.

ILSE MARIA LEIDECKER, *Germany*

We in Germany need the Vedantic ideas taught by Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna to feel brotherhood and unity amongst ourselves.

JULIANO CERCI, *Brazil*

Yes, I believe that not just Brazil but the entire world needs the spiritual ideas of India. All knowledge should be valued. A religion with 3,000 years of knowledge has immeasurable value. I believe that this kind of Vedantic knowledge could accelerate and help our search for illumination and is essential for us to have a good, happy life with a peaceful spirit. We need the force of Swami Vivekananda, the love of Sarada Devi, and the light of Sri Ramakrishna.

KENICHIRO TOYOFUKU, *Japan*

I think not many Japanese are interested in Swami Vivekananda's teachings, which were given a hundred years ago. However, in Japan there are many problems which will not be solved by the usual political or economical techniques. And we can't find newer techniques for solving these problems here. I think the teachings of Swami Vivekananda have a potential to cause new techniques. But the teachings, taught about 100 years ago, will not become 'a newer technique' if it remains unchanged. The instructions of Vivekananda are to be revised in the context of modern scientific data, like mental science, medical science, etc, which are put forth after a deep study of man. The Japanese people are eager to receive these revised teachings of Vivekananda.

ONG KAY JIN, *Singapore*

Yes, I humbly feel that my country needs

spiritual ideas, especially Vedantic ideas as taught by Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda was a realistic teacher; his teachings are simple, direct, and logical. Religion makes a lot of sense through his explanations and realizations. Vivekananda's teachings are suitable for all ages, for all time—past, present, and future.

NAVARATNASAMY KARTHIKEYAN, *Sri Lanka*

Sri Lanka has 69% Buddhists, 17% Hindus, 7% Muslims, and 7% Christians. Most of our people, who are followers of Buddhism and Hindu dharma, are highly religious, in the sense that they visit temples regularly (Fridays, full-moon days, etc), spend some time and money for religious activities, and observe various religious events. Despite this, we are witnessing an ongoing ethnic conflict for the past 19 years. In this conflict, more than 70,000 people have been killed, nearly one million people have been displaced, and thousands of Hindu temples and a few Buddhist temples have been destroyed. All these indicate that somewhere there is a serious lack in practising the true values of our respective religions. I think, since the early part of the last century our people have been strongly influenced by the western style of living, and as a result, have become more and more materialistic and selfish. As they spend more and more time seeking wealth and luxuries, they find very little time to understand the essence of their respective religions. In their search for pleasures, people face tough competition and many other problems. Few people manage to earn substantially, but then they struggle to protect themselves and to maintain their so-called social status. In these efforts they become afraid and arrogant, and try to treat others as slaves and lose their patience, happiness, and peace. Many others, who earn very little monetary wealth, live in uncertainty. People simply search for happiness in this material world and lose their happiness. This is the prevailing situation in our country.

In my opinion, there is need to remind our people of the highest goals of human aspi-

ration. I strongly feel that Swami Vivekanandaji's message, which is based on

Vedantic ideas, is the ideal basis to effect these changes in our country.

What does the younger generation of your country want now?

ALIA GURTOV, USA

The younger generation, I'm unhappy to report, are almost inaccessible by any religion. We are encouraged to indulge in our more rebellious natures, and take pride in questioning all forms of authority. In most cases, we would be unable to accept a guru, or lack the patience required of a disciple. However, unlike most Westerners, we could easily apply Vedantic teachings to our lives. The teenage years are rough, and the greatest problem is letting emotion control and define us. But with Vedantic discrimination we could come to understand ourselves and our minds.

BITAN BHATTACHARYA, Bangladesh

The younger generation of Bangladesh apparently want good education, sufficient money and happy marriage. Through all these, what they actually seek for is happiness, which is really very tough to obtain. Absolute happiness can only be achieved through Vedanta.

CARLOS JAVIER D'ANGELO, Argentina

As a teacher in a secondary institution, I spend my days with the new Argentine generation. The point I am specially worried about is that I am seeing most of the students in a state of abulia. Practically nothing can induce them to learn. Their interest is in getting jobs and having a steady relationship with their partners. Young people, mainly between 15 and 20 years old, have no goals in life except for those mentioned above, and they use their professional degrees as tools to present a better curriculum vitae in the work market, which is also in a crisis. They are not interested in reading good books, much less those about spiritual subjects, nor do they participate in cultural activities. To any subject demanding an intellectual effort their reaction is rejection, annoyance or indifference. I believe this panorama has its origin in the social and economic

crisis we are going through since ten years. Educators also are being overwhelmed by a sea of material worries.

CLAIRE GOODAL, UK

I don't really know what the younger generation of this country want now. But from some of the things I have heard I think the younger generation want something to believe in and to explain why life is the way it is. And to see an alternative in peoples who are good examples, and believing that spiritual ideas can work with day-to-day living. Unfortunately, some of the teenagers haven't had the opportunity or upbringing to learn about different religions.

DANA SUGU, Romania

It is difficult to generalize a 'want' of a nation since every individual has her/his own priorities. Keeping in mind the past—those almost fifty years of communist suppression—it is not difficult to guess a general tendency—the need to break free from the rigid doctrine of totalitarianism and dictatorship in any sphere of life—social, cultural, educational, religious. The youth want to be free, and this desire drives the younger generation in different directions. For them, it is the time to go for the 'forbidden fruit' and in this everything can be included. It is well known that any suppression will be inactive for a period of time and begins to manifest when the external conditions become favourable. So it is time for the fulfilment of frustrations and manifestation of suppressed desires.

'The Communist Party does not recognize any other God than the Leader of the Communist Party. He is the Father, Mother, and the Son of the whole nation.' This was the message for our people for almost 50 years, and now people have to learn to live in freedom, faith and confidence. It is a long process when we have to forget what we had been

forced to learn and to replace it with a different attitude towards life and its real values. We need to learn that Self-knowledge is not a luxury but a requirement for humanity's survival.

ILSE MARIA LEIDECKER, *Germany*

The youth of Germany have a strong desire to realize their oneness with God. But unfortunately the idea of how to achieve this oneness is not properly clear and now there is a lot of confusion as several influences come from different religious groups and sects.

JULIANO CERCI, *Brazil*

The younger generation is anxious for change. A large majority of young people today are unsatisfied with their own lives and the environment in which they live. It is a dissatisfaction internally as well as externally. I think this discontent with oneself represents a thirst for knowledge and an urge for spiritual growth. Similarly, dissatisfaction with the environment represents our indignation against violence and hunger, in essence, against social inequalities.

KENICHIRO TOYOFUKU, *Japan*

In general, the Japanese young people do not have the clear target about the future. They are not interested in material happiness, which they have already gained. And so they are asking for spiritual happiness. However, since spiritual happiness is too abstract to become a clear target, the Japanese young people are asking for an objective target about spiritual happiness.

NAVARATNASAMY KARTHIKEYAN, *Sri Lanka*

As I said, our country faces a terrible ethnic conflict. In this background, our younger generation primarily wants to live in peace and happiness, and live without any oppression. Almost all of them are concerned with their future.

Most of the youth of my country feel that they need a good job. They want to stand on their own feet.

A considerable number of youth in this category feel that they should enjoy the maximum. They feel that they can have whatever

fun (even unethical ones like drinking, smoking, etc) that (in their view) does not harm others. They want to be different from others. They want to acquire many modern luxury gadgets.

Most youth of this category have faith in God and worship God regularly, but they do not want to spend much time in knowing the essence of religion. They feel they could spend more time for such things towards the fag end of their lives.

A significant number of youth, whom I call the second category, feel that they will not have a better future (mainly due to the 19-year old ethnic conflict) in this country, but only lead a hopeless life. They want to escape from this situation, mostly by way of migration. Most of them say that they believe in God and pray to Him for good luck and good opportunities in life. They take little care in educating themselves and feel that others are not allowing them to live a better life.

To the third category belong a number of youth who have high confidence in themselves as well as in God. They too want to have a good education in order to find a respectable job and earn a happy living; but they also want to spend some time to study, understand, and practise religion. They also want to serve needy people, build good character, and upgrade themselves spiritually; because they believe that only such things would bring them everlasting happiness and peace of mind. Interestingly, most of them have read at least a few passages of Swami Vivekanandaji and have been inspired by his message.

ONG KAY JIN, *Singapore*

I think all want happiness and freedom. However, they are not sure of where to find them. Therefore they begin searching for happiness and freedom in all the wrong places and through wrong means, like drugs, sex, violence, and intoxication. Spirituality is what they truly want, but true spiritual education is not easily available nor promoted. Therefore many suffer owing to repeated ignorant actions and spiritually immature decisions. □

'During Natural Calamities...'

READERS' RESPONSES

Natural calamities are so common in India. What could our busy readers, so keen on helping others, do during such tragedies to serve the suffering people, we asked (see Prabuddha Bharata, April 2001). Your responses are, as usual, brilliant. Almost all of you are of the opinion that monetary donation is the most essential help. You have also suggested some other means. We publish a few of your opinions, and thank each one of you for the interest you have shown in this subject.

DR SITAL BANERJEE (70), Bardhaman: 'We have to organize ourselves under a single banner. We could start an emergency fund by contributing regularly, as far as possible. More effective is regular prayers for the suffering people.'

JISNU BHATTACHARYA (32), Kolkata: 'Readers of *Prabuddha Bharata* belong to various age groups and various countries. The most practical and workable suggestion would be rendering financial help, which we could send to the Ramakrishna Mission headquarters in Belur Math.'

DR C.S. SHAH (52), Aurangabad: 'Some workable suggestions are: (a) liberal financial donations; (b) enrolling with the nearest Ramakrishna Mission centre for voluntary service the next time it's needed; (c) encouraging friends and relatives to contribute to the disaster relief fund.'

SUDAKSHINA BHATTACHARYA (38), Kolkata: 'The minds of *Prabuddha Bharata* readers, inspired by the lofty ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, are very sensitive towards those suffering from natural calamities. So they can donate money even by curtailing some of their amusement expenses.

Old garments and food items could be sent. Moreover, all readers may pray to the Lord.'

Like many other readers, **LT COL R.K. LANGAR**, Jammu, feels that 'We can also consider adopting a child who has lost its parents in a natural calamity,' and adds: 'Busy people's immediate service to the sufferers is to send cash through some agency. Later, help should be provided in kind. Again, sincere prayers of a pure heart can work wonders.'

BISHNU SANKAR VERMA, c/o 99 APO: 'A pure and holy life can be of immense help. Our daily life is a part of the collective, universal, life. We can motivate our dependants (children, relations) to rush to the affected spot to serve the victims.'

PARASHURAM RAM, Patna: 'Sending out a current of love and goodwill for all beings is one idea. Contributing to the Relief Fund of the Ramakrishna Mission is another.'

DR SHANKAR CHATTERJEE (43), Hyderabad: 'Donations, visiting the affected place and serving people, adopting a family for at least one year, contributing each month, arranging funds for constructing a house for a family, etc are some ideas. If one is not at all able to do all this, he or she can pray.' □

Some other valuable suggestions came from:

Partha Sarathi De, Kolkata; Madan Mohan Roy, Hooghly; B.N. Das, Muzaffarpur; Dilip Chandra Nath, Hooghly; Shiv Das Kashyap, Bareilly; Madhumita Ghose, Kolkata; Bishnupada Rai, Barrackpore; Bikash Chandra Satapathy, Cuttack; Nakuleswar Basu, Jharkhand; K.L.R. Prabhu, Udupi; Samir Bakshi, Bandel; Chinmoyee Prasanna Ghosh, Midnapore; Asim Roy, Kolkata; Dr Gour Gopal Bhuniya, Midnapore; V. Ramamurthy, Tumkur; etc.

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Who is a brāhmaṇa?

He who knows Brahman is a *brāhmaṇa*: 'brahma-jānātīti brāhmaṇaḥ.' A brahmin's son is a *brāhmaṇa* (brahmin). A brahmin by caste is a brahmin and, again, he or she who is traveling along the path of Brahman is a brahmin.

Sri Ramakrishna saw swans flying past dark clouds and went into samadhi. Why could this have happened?

He had become ecstatic seeing a beautiful scene: seeing something physical and enjoying spiritual bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna could not eat food items brought by all and sundry. But he would send them to Swamiji. Why?

Sri Ramakrishna would say that the fire of knowledge was burning brilliantly in Naren; everything would be burnt to ashes in that fire. But Sri Ramakrishna would not accept such things himself in order to set an example: he taught everyone through his own example of an exemplary and pure life.

Sri Ramakrishna has spoken about achina ('the unrecognizable') tree. Which is this achina tree?

That tree about which nothing is known is the 'unrecognizable' tree. Sri Ramakrishna says that the avatar is similar to other human beings in size and shape; everything about him is like us mortals. But you do not feel he is a human being. Human beings cannot recog-

nize the avatar, our minds cannot extend that far. So Sri Ramakrishna says that there is a tree called *achina*, and nobody knows what it is [cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 283].

They offer navapatrikā during Durgā Pūjā; they offer it during Kojāgarī Lakṣmī Pūjā. What is this navapatrikā?

Wherever it may be offered, *navapatrikā* is Durgā. 'Navapatrikā-vāsinyai durgāyai namaḥ, O Durga! You dwell in the *navapatrikās*. We offer our salutations to you!' This is one of the mantras that is uttered. Mother is omnipresent. According to tradition, *navapatrikā* should be dedicated on the morning of Āśvina śukla saptamī. What is *navapatrikā*?

Kadalī dādimī dhānyam

haridrā mānakam kacuḥ;

Bilvāśokau jayanti ca

vijñeyā navapatrikā.

Plantain, pomegranate, rice, turmeric, mānaka, kacu, bilva, aśoka, and jayanti, these nine plants are called *navapatrikās*. Each plant or tree has a presiding goddess, and that goddess is Durgā.

We do not see sadhus (monks) performing Durgā worship. Why?

Durgā Pūjā is performed according to Vedic and Purāṇic injunctions. So monks don't worship Durgā, whereas Kālī Pūjā is performed according the tantric tradition.

Why did Sri Ramakrishna advise M

[Mahendranath Gupta, the recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna] to refrain from reasoning?

Sri Ramakrishna showed the path that was suitable for M. In other instances, Sri Ramakrishna has also advised reasoning. You have to climb the stairs step by step, is it not?

Sri Ramakrishna says that those who think of him will obtain his glories. What is meant by 'thinking' here?

To think of him as one's chosen Ideal (*iṣṭa*). We must think of him as the supreme Lord. It is not how much time you devote but how much mind you devote that is important.

Maharaj, why did Sri Ramakrishna say: 'Money is earth and earth is money'?

This is a mystery. In the Assamese language, the word '*māṭi*' [the original Bengali word which Ramakrishna used for 'earth'] means land; so that has value. But 'money is earth and earth is money' means, just as money has no value, land also has no value. Just as we say in Bengali: 'Ah! All my money became earth,' which means money was wasted. So in Sri Ramakrishna's statement, 'earth' means 'of little worth'.

Why would Sri Ramakrishna bless devotees as 'May your spiritual consciousness be awakened'?

The reason is, all are unconscious, and he wished that they have knowledge. He would say: 'What more shall I say? May your spiritual consciousness be awakened' [cf. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, p. 1023].

Sri Ramakrishna has said that householders need renunciation in order to go along the right path. Does he mean sannyasa?

Sannyasa means renouncing everything, both physically and mentally. For the householder, if the desire goes, he or she may have the vision of the chosen ideal. There is no need for external renunciation. How many times has Sri Ramakrishna not repeated this:

'Householders should go into solitude now and then, to practise spiritual discipline in order to cultivate devotion to God; they should renounce mentally. But the sannyasi should renounce both mentally and physically' [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 291].

So should householders not renounce everything?

If you have the responsibility for others on your shoulders, you must take care of them. For such people Sri Ramakrishna has advised mental renunciation. He has spoken of another group of people who are mad after God. For them there is no responsibility or duty at all. However, you should not pretend madness, you must be genuinely mad for God.

Maharaj, suppose I renounce now, where shall I go, what shall I eat?

Do you think you will become a monk after making suitable arrangements for your food etc? Did we renounce the world after enquiring if the Math would provide our food? As long as there is the body, there is the household also. You can live in the world itself and perform sadhana.

Sri Ramakrishna offered everything at the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. But why did he not give up truth?

Sri Ramakrishna himself has answered this by saying that, if he gave away truth, where shall the truth of his giving away remain? The idea is to hold on to truth in word, deed and thought—to speak the truth, to think truthfully, and to work truthfully.

Swami Vivekananda has called Sri Ramakrishna the embodiment of the Vedas. Why?

'The embodiment of Vedas' means that he is the personification of eternal knowledge.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Spiritual Realization in Śaivism

DR PRABHU SHANKARA

Dr Prabhu Shankara was visiting professor of the Vivekananda Chair, instituted by the University of Mysore. Author of several books on Viraśaivism as well as general topics, Prof Prabhu Shankara is closely associated with the Ramakrishna movement. This article on Śaivism is a result of the author's deep study of the subject.

Scholars are of the opinion that Śaivism is perhaps the most ancient faith in the world. According to Sir John Marshall, the excavations in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa reveal an important fact that Śaivism has a history dating back to the Chalcolithic Age or even farther still, and it therefore takes the position of the most ancient living faith in the world.¹

We have three versions of Śaivism. The first, the earliest form of Śaivism, is known as the Śaiva-siddhānta, systematized and practised in Tamil Nadu. The second is the Advaita form of Kashmir Śaivism. The third is Viraśaivism, currently a living religion with a vast following in the regions of Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.

Let us acquaint ourselves with the concept of liberation and the path to attain it as enunciated in Śaivism. Several scholars of great eminence have, by tireless toil, brought to light the tenets of Śaivism, embedded in its literature, which is voluminous and is spread over a period of fifteen centuries.

According to Śaivism, there are three categories. These are the three ultimates. They are: *pati*, *paśu* and *pāśa*. *Pati* is Śiva without be-

ginning, free from defects, all-doing, all-wise and who removes the meshes of bonds that enshroud the individual soul (*jīva* or *paśu*). He is also self-existing. The second category is *paśu*, 'cattle', owned by or subject to the first

category, the Lord, *pati*. *Paśu* is the individual soul. The soul is by nature infinite, pervasive, omniscient and so on. But it experiences that it is finite, limited, ignorant or is endowed with very little knowledge. This is due to the *malas* or impurities. *Malas* are three in number: *āṇava*, *kārmika* and *māyā*. *Āṇava mala* is a connate or innate impurity. It is there with the soul from the very beginning. Because of this impurity the soul, though infinite, feels that it is finite.

Souls are many. They act in certain ways which, according to them, is good or evil. Their actions lead them to the second of the bondages—*kārmika mala*. In order to experience the consequences of their karmas or actions and gain knowledge thereby, there should be worlds, objects of enjoyment and instruments of cognition and enjoyment. These are provided by the third category of impurities—the *māyā mala*.

Śaivism designates the world of *māyā* as *asat*. But *asat* here does not mean either non-existing or unreal. Because, according to



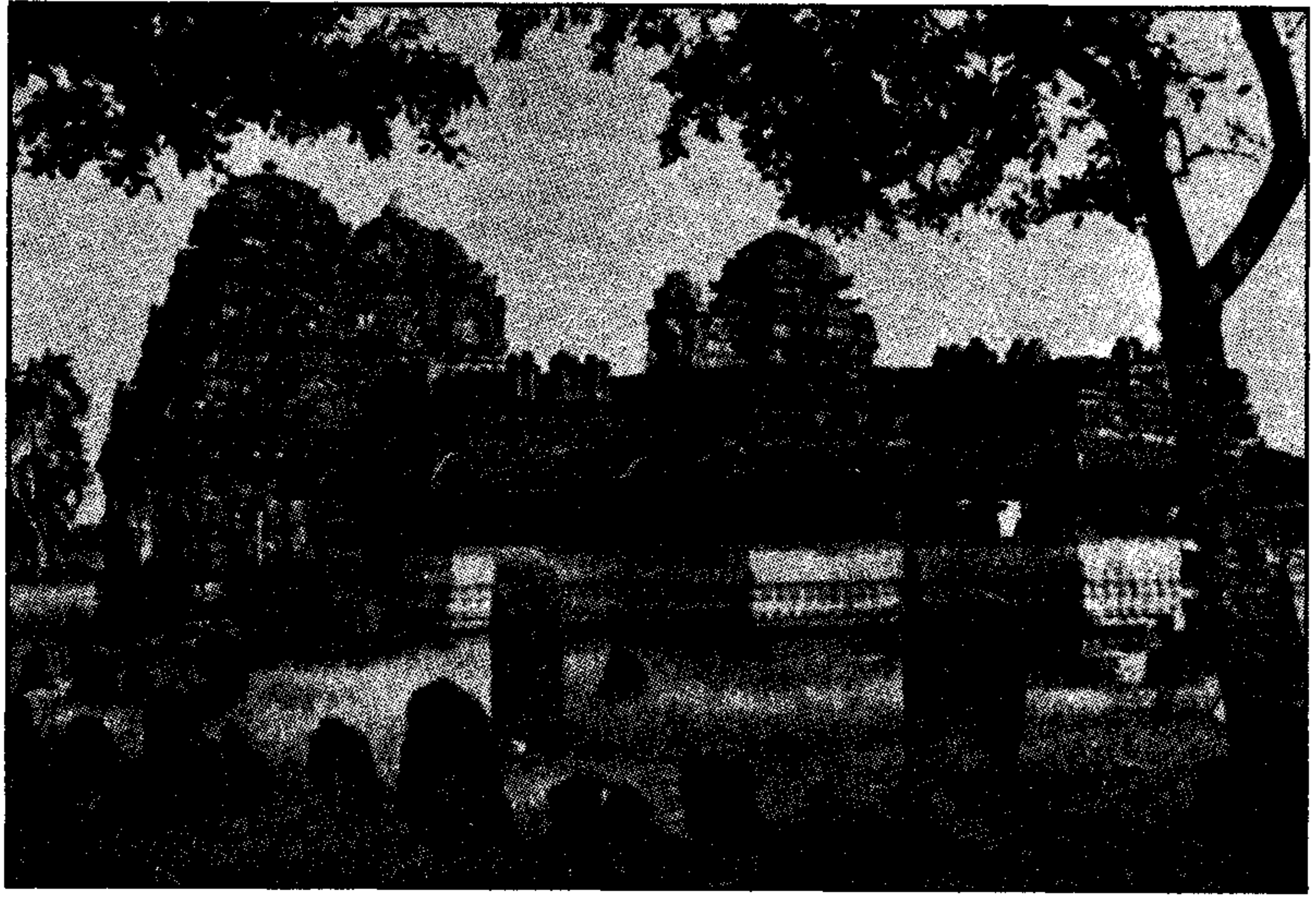
Bhagavān Śiva

1. Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Civilization.

Śaivism, *sat* means Śiva. So whatever is different from Śiva is *asat*. *Asat* is used in the sense that *māyā* is *acit*. In order to become free, each soul has to realize the nature of Śiva and also of the world.

There are four paths to freedom or moksha. Technically they are *caryā*, *kriyā*, *yoga* and *jñāna*. They are connoted by these four names: *dāsa*, *satputra*, *sakhā* and *sat*. The spiritual aspirant follows the path of *caryā* and serves Śiva as his servant. Cleaning the precincts of the temple, offering daily worship to Śiva, rendering service to the devotees of the Lord, engaging oneself in bhajans—these are some of the elementary *caryās*. In the next stage of *kriyā*, the individual soul becomes nearer to Śiva. The *sādhaka* serves the Lord, heart and soul, as a good son serves his father. The next stage is that of *yoga*. Here the individual soul denounces sense gratification. This becomes possible by meditating on the Lord. The spiritual aspirant looks upon Śiva as his friend. The three paths just described are preparatory for the individual soul to acquire the nature of Śiva. It finally attains this state through the fourth path, *jñāna*, which is also called *sanmārga*. This is spiritual realization, where the *jīvātmā* attains perfection and becomes free from all fetters.

Though the different schools of Śaivism are described as Advaitic in their nature, their Advaita is different from Śaṅkara's Advaita. Here the individual soul neither becomes Śiva nor realizes itself as Śiva. The feeling of *śivo'ham* is not there. The *jīva*, even in its real-



Kedāreśvara temple, Belgaum, Karnataka

ized state, is different from Śiva. Release is not mergence. If the *jīva* merges with Śiva, or thinks that it is Śiva himself, then who is there to enjoy freedom? God cannot enjoy freedom, because he is eternally free. 'In bondage the soul experienced through *pāśa*; now it experiences through *pati* (the Lord); its knowledge is no longer *pāśa-jñāna*, but *pati-jñāna*; *pati-jñāna* means not the Lord's knowledge, but the soul's knowledge through the Lord.'²

In the state of spiritual liberation the *jīvātmā* or the individual soul is free from the *malas* or impurities mentioned above. It experiences absolute bliss of Śiva, without, of course, its union with Śiva. According to Śaiva-siddhānta this is real Advaita. A before *dvaita* does not indicate the negation of two principles, but it indicates the negation of the feeling of dualism.

When the time is ripe for a *jīva* to attain freedom from the *malas* there appears a guru. He gives *dikṣā*, initiation, to the individual

2. S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri, 'The Philosophy of Śaivism' in *The Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1953), Vol. 3, p. 397.

who is ready to undertake the pilgrimage towards liberation. The guru leads the spiritual aspirant to knowledge, which alone is the saviour according to Śaiva-siddhānta.

One of the most important elements of Śaivism is the position that divine grace occupies in this system. It has a very suggestive term for the process of the Lord's grace—*śivānugraha*—to descend on the worthy soul. The term is *śaktipāta* (also called *śaktinipāta*). It is the redemptive grace of Lord Paramaśiva. There are three types of *śaktipāta*: *tivra*, *madhyama* and *manda*. If the individual Self is fully qualified by its meritorious deeds (*karma-paripāka*), the redemptive grace of God will immediately release him from bondage. This is called *tivra śaktipāta*. Such exalted souls who are fit to receive divine grace need hardly undergo any of the spiritual disciplines, nor practise any rituals. Those persons who are less qualified will receive *madhyama śaktipāta* of the supreme Being, Śiva. They will have to practise austerities and receive initiation. The third group, which gets *manda śaktipāta* will be induced to get interested in spiritual life.

Now, a brief account of *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā* of Utpalācārya which is an easy manual to know the Pratyabhijñā system of Kashmir Śaivism. 'The word *pratyabhijñā* means re-cognition. The individual self or *jīva* is divine or Śiva, but he has forgotten his real nature, and is identified with his psycho-physical mechanism. The teaching is meant to enable him to recognize his real nature, to bring home to him the truth that his real self is none other than Śiva and to suggest to him the spiritual discipline by which he can attain "at-one-ment" with him.'³

According to this school, Reality in its ultimate aspect is *cit* or *parama-saivī*. The supreme Self is called Paramaśiva. He has infinite *śakti*. He is subjecting himself to *māyā* and putting on the five *kañcukas* or cloaks which



Śrī Basaveśvara

limit his universal knowledge and power, and he becomes *puruṣa* or the individual subject. *Puruṣa* does not merely mean the human form, but every sentient being thus limited.

Liberation to this system means the re-cognition (*pratyabhijñā*) of one's true nature. It comes by *śaktipāta* (the descent of divine *śakti*) or *anugraha*, ie divine grace. But grace does not come of its own accord. It has to be earned by moral and spiritual discipline, with the help of a guru.

To quote Jaideva Singh, a great authority on Kashmir Śaivism:⁴

Involution starts from the pure I-consciousness of Śiva. Evolution gets back to the same pure Consciousness, but the pilgrim goes back to his home, enriched with the experience of the splendour of Śiva he has had on the way. Veil after veil lifts, and he is now poised in the heart of Reality. He may now well exclaim in the words of Abhinavagupta:

Svatantraḥ svacchātmā

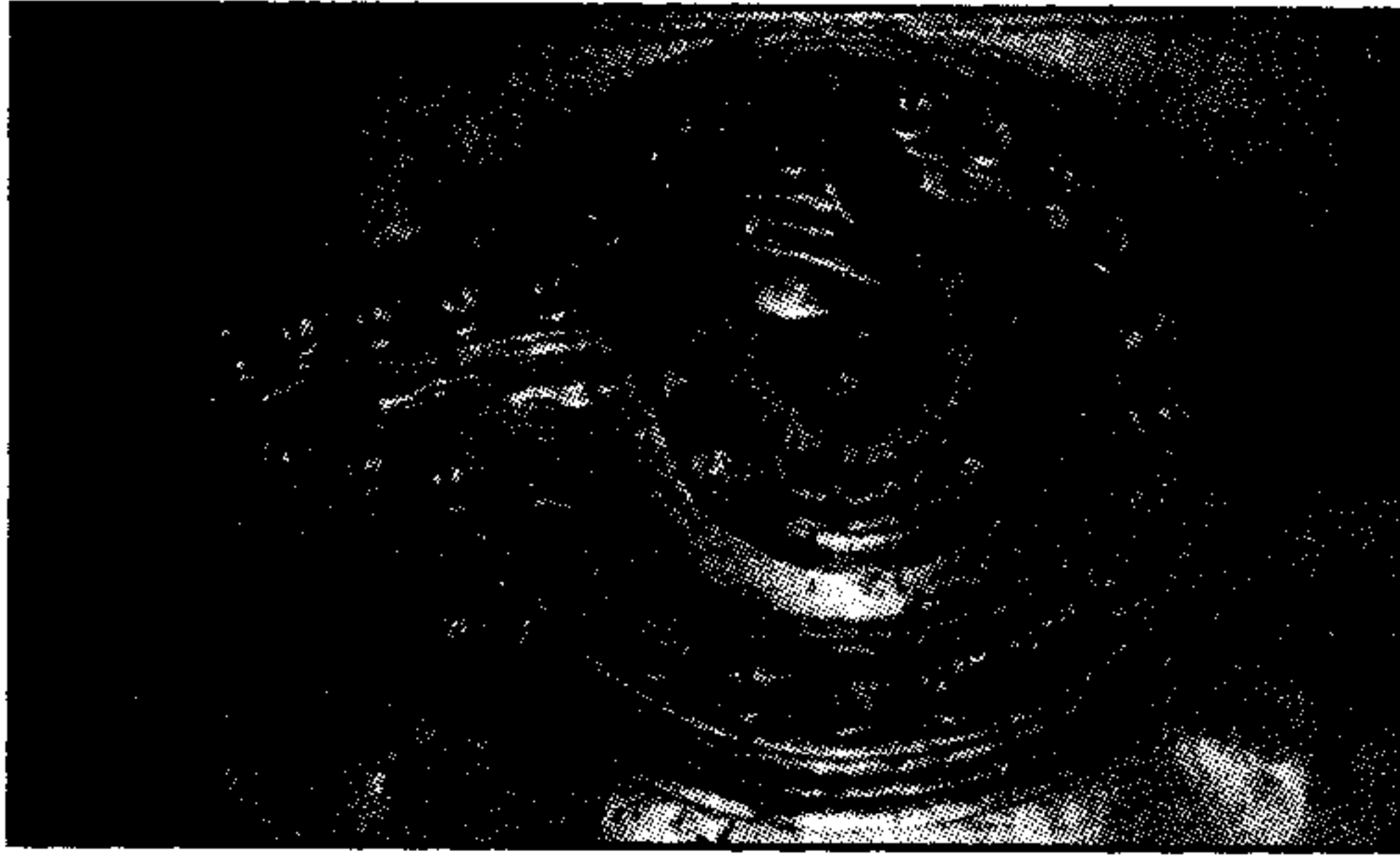
sphurati satataṁ cetasi śivāḥ

Parāśaktiśceyaṁ

karaṇasaraṇiprāntamudinā;

3. Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p. 4.

4. Ibid., p. 32.



The holy Śivaliṅga: Varanasi

*Tadā bhogaikātmā
sphurati ca samastam jagadidaṁ
Na jāne kutrāyaṁ
dhvaniranupatet saṁsṛtiriti.*

(—quoted in *Mahārthamañjarī*, p. 25)

‘It is Śiva Himself, of unimpeded will and pellucid consciousness, who is ever sparkling in my heart. It is His highest Śakti Herself that is ever playing on the edge of my senses. The entire world gleams as the wondrous delight of pure I-consciousness. Indeed I know not what the sound “world” is supposed to refer to.’

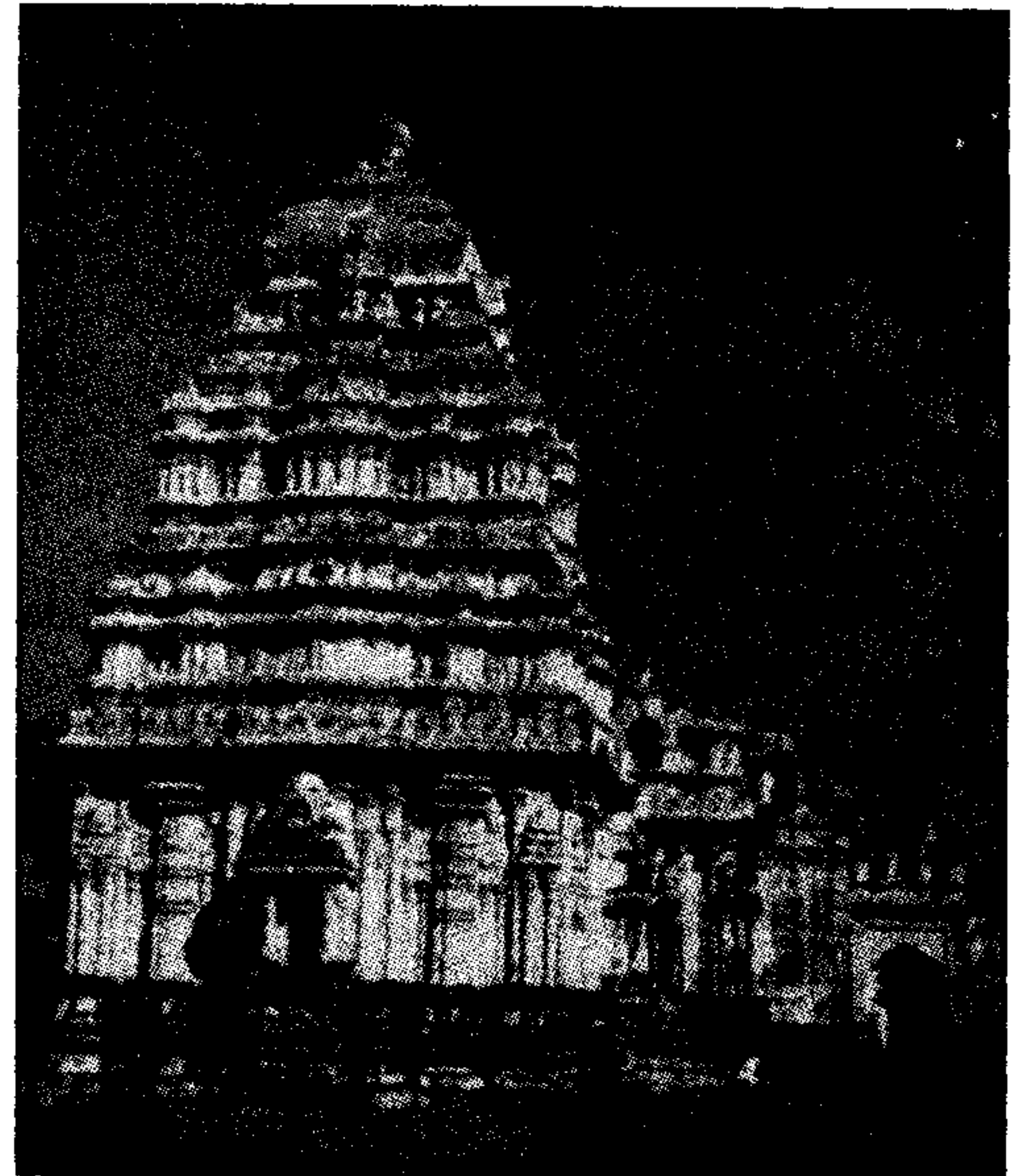
Next comes Viraśaivism. Basaveśvara, a great social reformer and mystic of Karnataka, a state in southern India, either founded or re-organized Viraśaivism, an eclectic religion, in the 12th century AD. (Viraśaivism was not founded by Bijjala, a Chalukya king with whom Basaveśvara worked and who turned antagonistic to the latter, as erroneously mentioned by the renowned historian K.A. Nilakanta Sastri in his article ‘A Historical Sketch of Śaivism’ in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 2, p. 34.)

Viraśaivas are also known as Liṅgāyatas—persons who wear the *iṣṭaliṅga* on their bodies to remind them constantly of the vicinity of Lord Śiva. Śiva, with Śakti, is the supreme deity for them and hence this system is called Śakti-viśiṣṭādvaita. The religion has received many ideas from both Tamil Śaivism and Kashmir Śaivism. Here bhakti or intense love of God occupies the place of jnana or knowledge of Śaivism.

The concept of *ṣaṭsthala* is the original

contribution of Viraśaivism. *Jīva* is designated *aṅga* and Śiva is designated *liṅga*. Śiva who is formless enters into Māyā Śakti and is called *jīva*. The apparent difference between the two is Śiva is all-knowing, whereas the *jīva* is endowed with very little knowledge and power. *Jīva* is bound by the *malapāśa*—shackles of impurities—and engages itself in worldly activities forgetting its true Śiva-nature. The guru gives the *iṣṭaliṅga* to the disciple at the time of initiation or *dīkṣā*. Śiva is very much alive in a latent form in the *iṣṭaliṅga*. The disciple, as an ardent spiritual seeker should worship the *iṣṭaliṅga* and gradually attain the union of *jīva* with Śiva. This is the highest spiritual ideal of Viraśaivism.

Technically *sthala* means the supreme Being. But in common parlance *sthala* may be defined as a step or a particular state of mind or position. There are six such steps and hence the term *ṣaṭsthala* that goes with the philosophy of Viraśaivism. In each *sthala* the Lord or the *liṅga* descends to the state of the *jīva* or *aṅga* and helps it ascend to its real nature. To state it in simpler and non-technical parlance,



The sacred shrine of Viraśaivism: Saṅgameśvara temple, Bijapur, Karnataka

the Lord lends his helping hand to the *jīva* to 'drag' it to higher and higher states until the two become one. This is a beautiful concept and has lent a distinctive stature to Viraśaivism.

The first stage is called *bhakta sthala*. The *liṅga* worshipped is known as *ācāra liṅga*. And the bhakti practised here is called *sadbhakti*. The devotee is enjoined to practise good deeds and offer them with his hand of *sucitta* to the Lord.

The next is *maheśvara sthala*. The *liṅga* worshipped is *guru liṅga*. Worship is offered with the hand of *subuddhi*. The *sādhaka* should have firm faith in his *iṣṭaliṅga* and should during this stage of sadhana reject all other gods and goddesses. Then only can his *śraddhā* take strong roots in his chosen Ideal or *iṣṭaliṅga*.

In the third stage the devotee offers worship with his *nirahamkāra* hand. That stage is called *prasādi sthala*. The Lord who stands by him is known as *mahāliṅga* and the love that is shown by the aspirant is *avadhana bhakti*. He now realizes that the one who receives all experiences through the senses is the Lord himself. The devotee accepts all experiences as the *prasāda* of the Lord and enjoys them as such.

The fourth stage is termed *prāṇaliṅgi sthala*. The devotee offers his worship with *sumano-hasta*. And the devotion in this stage is called *anubhava bhakti*. Whatever happens now and hereafter is of the internal world. It is the dual process of establishing *prāṇa* in the *liṅga*, which is Śiva, and establishing Śiva in the *prāṇa*. This process is called *śiva yoga*. This is also raja yoga. It is the yoga of controlling the mind, which is volatile by nature, and concentrating it on the object of meditation. In the process the *citta* becomes pure and the *buddhi* crystal clear. Egotism—*ahamkāra*—is destroyed. The mind rests in the *liṅga* and enjoys peace. The devotee's consciousness reflects the light of the Lord. Gradually he realizes the nature of his real Self. One should remember

that this process certainly needs the help of the *liṅga*—and in this stage, it is called *cara liṅga*. The *jīva* experiences a state of *advaita*. Allama Prabhu, a great *jñānin* of those days, describes this state in one of his *vacanas* (a poetic-prose composition):

For the *prāṇa liṅga* the body is the couch,
The heavenly Gaṅgā is the bath,
Flowerless fragrance is worship.
In the lotus of the heart a sound—
Śiva, Śiva—goes on,

That is *advaita*, O Guheśvara.

The aspirant cannot live, in this state, without the Lord, even for a moment. This leads him to the penultimate stage, called *śaraṇa sthala*.

Here the bhakti practised is *ānanda bhakti*; the hand that offers is *sujñāna hasta*, and the Lord is *śiva liṅga*. No rituals are practised in this state. The aspirant is full of jnana. His companion in the lotus of his heart is Paramaśiva himself. This leads him to the sixth and the last stage called *aikya sthala*.

The bhakti here is *samarasa bhakti* and it is offered in *sadbhāva hasta*. The Lord here is *acara liṅga*. In this state there is no distinction between the knower, the known and knowledge. It is the ultimate state of union like milk merging with milk. The Viraśaiva path of sadhana ultimately leads the aspirant to this state of spiritual realization. All the same, it is said, that it is different from Advaita.

There is one more element of great importance. Basavaṇṇa insisted that a *sādhaka* should, despite the stage of *ṣaṭsthala* he has reached, including the ultimate one, earn his bread by the sweat of his manual labour. This principle is termed *kāyaka*. And it is an integral part of Viraśaiva philosophy. □

5. *Naming the Nameless (101 Vacanas)*, trans. Prabhu Shankara and Rowena Hill (Mysore: Nivedita Prakashana), p. 37.

Metaphor(s) in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

DR SUMITA ROY

Dr Sumita Roy teaches English at the Osmania University, Hyderabad. In this brilliant article, Dr Roy studies Sri Ramakrishna's Gospel in a masterly way.

If Ramakrishna is considered the culmination of five thousand years of Indian spirituality, then the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is also a culmination of all the essence of Indian philosophy, religion and spirituality. It is a text which is today engaging global attention for its multifaceted nature. Translations and interpretations of it are being done for doctoral degrees of prestigious universities in different parts of the developed world.

All this is due to one major quality of the *Gospel*. It makes itself open to limitless perspectives. It sustains innumerable insights and interpretations. It is like the *kamadhenu* or *kalpataru* of the classical Indic systems which has the ability to fulfil desires and expectations as varied and diverse as there are seekers.

And all those who have come into contact with the *Gospel* will admit the truth of this statement. To a devotee who reads it regularly as a scripture it is a model for strengthening devotion, to an intellectual who reads it for the purpose of research it provides food for the most complex discourse and interpretation, while to a first-time reader it often holds out

an irresistible fascination for continued exposure. In all cases the desire for repeated engagement with the text seems inevitable.

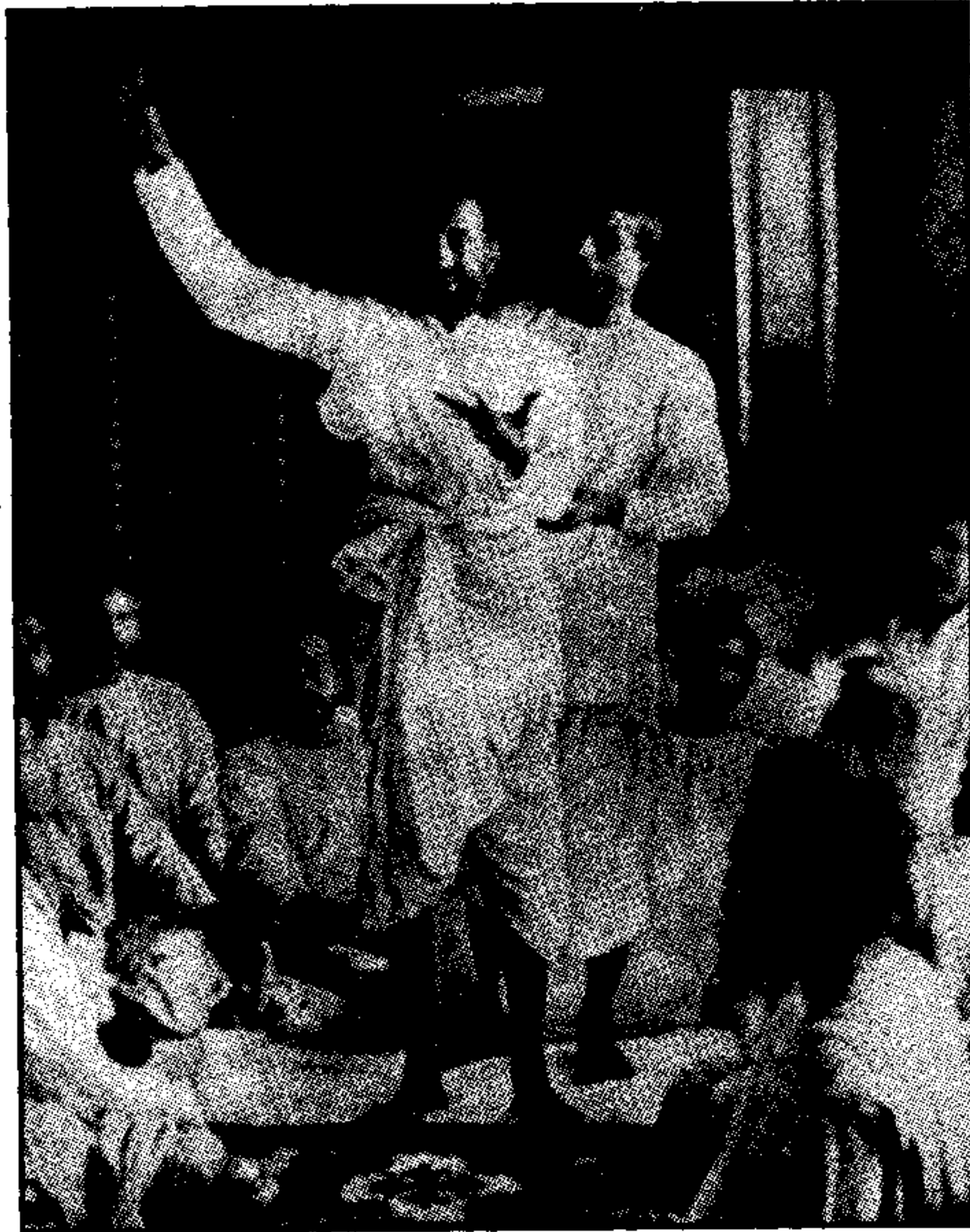
Like Sri Ramakrishna's own dominant

metaphor of the varieties of fish a loving mother cooks for her numerous progeny each suiting the digestive ability of the young ones is the *Gospel* to us. We can choose what to absorb and by imbibing that which suits our temperament we make progress on the path of realization which also happens to be the central message of the *Gospel*.

If asked to condense the essence of Ramakrishna's message in this book I am sure everyone will instantly say that according to

Ramakrishna God-realization is the only goal of human existence. He puts this in different ways repeatedly throughout the text and the *Gospel* itself structures the process of this realization.

Therefore we can conclude that the *Gospel* is a metaphor for our inward quest as it authenticates those dimensions of existence which have almost been obliterated by the modern sensate culture. In fact, recently a



Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi:
Embodiment of divine love

question was asked as to why the topic specifies 'metaphor' in the singular when the expectation of the readers is to hear an analysis of some of the metaphors that abound in Ramakrishna's *Gospel*. This is quite an interesting query.

It is common knowledge that great teachers down the ages have made effective use of the metaphoric mode to explicate the ineffable inner experience, and Sri Ramakrishna is no exception. But beyond these obvious instances there is in the *Gospel* the everyday life of Ramakrishna, his relationship with people, his all-encompassing love, his repeated ecstasies and the unending 'mart of joy' which his presence brought into the lives of all those who came into contact with him. All these can be taken as an extended metaphor of that model of perfection which we can emulate.

That is why we can read the *Gospel* as a metaphor for everyone who has had a surfeit of exploring the external world and is in search of a path to that inward journey of adventure which sages have prescribed as the only source of everlasting bliss, the only goal worthy of achievement. Thus, the inadvertent mention of the singular—that is, metaphor, instead of metaphors—seems to spell out a unique significance of its own. It opens one more new door to enter the world of the text, an additional key to relate to it. The *Gospel* then is a metaphor for abstract descriptions which expect conformity such as meaningful existence, value-oriented living, positive evolution, etc. It only remains for us to expend every effort to concretize these abstractions by choosing the right parameters from the text to suit our particular and specialized designs of existence.

The tools of God-realization available in the *Gospel* are unending in both their range and diversity. In our ethos dominated by a constant tendency to secularization a term such as God-realization is bound to cause numerous raised eyebrows. Keeping this trend in view we can restructure the term to be designated as interiorization. The God of the mys-

tic, the God of the rationalist and the God of the scientist may be in apparent conflict, but as the great mystic poet Blake says in his poem 'The Tyger' creation itself can be taken as a mode of defining the creator.

The whole world and its inhabitants therefore form the basis of our inward journey. Sri Ramakrishna never told us to reject externals. His acute sensibility was sensitive to the natural human tendencies and he was realistic in his injunctions. There are instances of his suggestion to intimate disciples to enjoy the world if they still felt a hankering for it before they thought of interior matters.

We can, in effect, take the *Gospel* as a continuous core of contemplative centrality. By keeping in mind some of the metaphors which Ramakrishna repeatedly uses in the text we can keep the interior dimension of our aspirations constantly in mind.

For instance, one of the hazards of living in a city today are the inevitable power cuts which we are subjected to. During such times the lighting of a candle is a habitual action. The flickering flame of the candle reminds us of the words of Ramakrishna about the nature of the human mind. Restless like the candle in the wind of worldliness, we can bring the flame of the mind to steadiness by protecting it from the breeze.

In this way our external world should serve as a constant reminder of the inner one. The nature of the mind has many metaphoric descriptions because in the inward movement the mind is our most important guide. Ramakrishna compares the mind to a white cloth which can be effortlessly dyed in any colour to indicate the possibility of choosing a positive or negative direction in life. Transformation is possible to a mind which is white and free of preconditions. Once it is coloured in worldliness it is impossible to bleach the cloth back to its original white hue.

Another metaphor for the mind is the brass pot which requires regular polish to keep it shining. An aspirant cannot practise spiritual discipline intermittently but has to be

vigilant constantly lest the mind become dull like an unpolished brass pot.

The possibility of the mind succumbing to inessentials and distractions in the course of existence is compared by Ramakrishna to a nail covered with mud which does not feel the pull of the magnet. Once the mud (external attractions) is scraped off the nail (mind) instantly rushes to the magnet (God).

Given these illustrations of the nature of the human mind, the next step in the aspirant's inward journey would be to learn what mental states are conducive to interiorization. Here Ramakrishna uses the metaphor of a maid servant. She works in the house of her master with commitment and treats his children with great affection. But in her heart of hearts she is well aware that none of this is her own and her real home is far away in the village. The attitude of the maid servant is the attitude of non-attachment and disinterested work, commitment without involvement, which is one of the disciplines that the mind has to practise.

Another metaphor for keeping the urgency of interior life constantly in our thoughts is that of a person who has some member of the family seriously ill at home. He comes to the place of his work and does his duty but his mind is lost in thoughts of the person at home. Ramakrishna gave the message of yearning through this metaphor.

Yearning should be so intense and desperate that it is like the struggle of a man whose head is thrust under water. When disciples complained to Ramakrishna that they

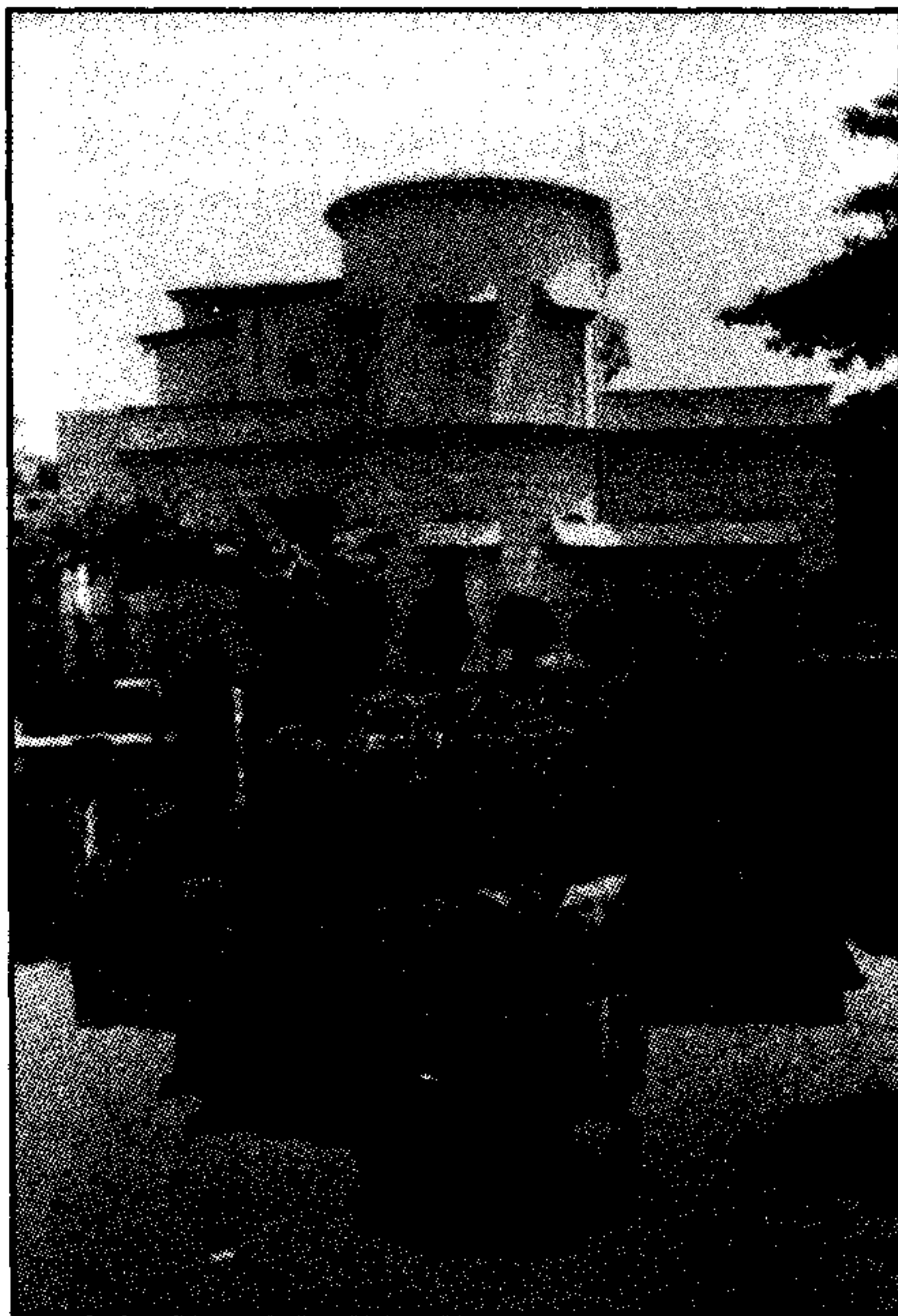
were unable to make progress in spiritual life he once spoke of this as the metaphor. The guru pushed the head of the disciple under water without any prior warning. The poor disciple applied all his strength to escape that vice-like grasp and get a breath of air. That is how genuine commitment to interiorization should feel, an instinctive and unified effort towards the goal.

Thus, for any advancement in life a

one-pointed concentration is essential. We know the truth of this in our secular existence, too. Ramakrishna's metaphor for total concentration which never wavers though apparently we are engaged in various activities is that of women with many pitchers of water who walk along gossiping with friends but do not allow a drop to spill, or a woman who helps in husking paddy while dealing with customers, suckling her child and frying grains. In both cases the women keep their entire concentration on one side while the other activities are incidental. So also is our worldly duty

to us. We should do it but not get so engrossed that we forget the purpose for which the human birth has been gifted to us.

Once Ramakrishna saw an English woman at the circus performing marvellous acrobatic feats. This became for him the metaphor for startling achievement through constant endeavour. The woman had learnt to balance herself so high in the air because she had put her whole mind to it. The human mind is an exceptional instrument. An aspirant can achieve wonders in inwardness by



Cossipore garden house, Kolkata
(now a Ramakrishna Math centre),
where Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body

similar committed and continuous endeavour.

To Ramakrishna the experiences of life were all suggestive of inwardness. One day he was asked to pose for a photograph in front of a camera and from it he drew a valuable lesson. He said that just as a plain glass will not retain the impression which a glass coated with silver nitrate does, similar is the human mind. Only when it is coated with the chemical of faith, love and devotion does it retain the impression of spirituality.

To prepare the mind to become receptive to interior matters Ramakrishna used the metaphor of a child. The child is beyond the three *gunas*. It can be made to give away a costly garment or toy in exchange for a small piece of sweet. One can make the child do anything by saying that one is going to take it to its mother. Such simplicity and innocence are essential criteria for an aspirant.

Once Ramakrishna saw the numerous chains that were holding a bridge in place and said that these were like the shackles of maya in the life of a person. Even if one chain breaks the rest of them hold him/her a prisoner in the world. One has to strive to break all the chains that bind us, which is not such an easy job.

Such are the hindrances on the path within. It is like the silkworm which weaves its cocoon and chooses to die in it. Or like the fish that are caught and bury their heads in the mud, unaware that the net will soon be pulled to the shore and spell their death. The first requirement is that we want to escape from the transitory nature of the impermanent world and find something more lasting.

Temptations abound in any serious quest. Ramakrishna's metaphor for this is the typhoid patient who has in his room a pitcher of water and a bottle of pickles. Both are irresistible to the person who is ill but even if he takes a little of either of the two his health deteriorates. Our external engagements are similarly attractive and to resist them requires immense effort. But keeping away from such activities is the only way to full recovery from

the fever of worldliness.

An average individual life exposes us to a great variety of experiences from which we have to discriminate the useful ones from others. Ramakrishna gave a metaphor to explicate this by quoting the example of water: some water can be used only for washing vessels and clothes, some for drinking and some for worship.

From discrimination comes singularity of purpose in order to give our energies a proper channel. If we go to a mango grove what is the use of counting the trees or the leaves? The best thing is to eat the maximum fruits that we can. Or, if we want to get drunk how does it serve our purpose to know the quantity of wine there is in the tavern. For our purpose just a tumbler or two are enough.

On the interior path there is constant need to alter the nature of the mind. One of the first characteristics to be cultivated is humility. Here Ramakrishna gives a very picturesque metaphor of rainwater collecting in a hollow place but overflowing from a mound. If our ego is high like a mound spiritual instruction will flow out like the rainwater. To store it we have to be low like the place in which rainwater accumulates.

Like the thread which cannot be put into the eye of the needle even if one fibre is sticking out is our plight. Unless we have a unitive consciousness it is impossible to achieve anything on this inward journey.

To speak about the total one-pointed devotion to the cause which interiorization demands Ramakrishna uses the metaphor of the miser's attachment to his wealth. We are reminded of characters in literature such as Scrooge, Shylock and Silas Marner who have become memorable through their miserliness in order to get the actual importance of this metaphor.

It appears that if the water of the lake is infested with ferocious crocodiles a swimmer can protect himself from them by rubbing turmeric on his body. This is a metaphor in the *Gospel* for the terrible existence in this world

where we need the protection of an inner dimension to swim across safely.

When we are searching for gems it is useless to swim in shallow waters. We shall have to dive deep into the ocean to find the real priceless gems. Ramakrishna suggests that we should also dive deep into our beings to find the incomparable treasure hidden there. Living on the surface does not reveal these precious depths to us.

Often Ramakrishna's metaphors are such that they give a jolt to our conditioned response of conformity. For instance, he speaks about the prostitute's total obsession with her lover as a metaphor for devotion. An apparently negative example serves the purpose of a positive lesson, just as the wine needed by the drunkard or the miser and his gold appear in the earlier metaphors. The mind has to get rid of its rigidities before it can embark on the expedition of the inner worlds.

Apart from spirituality the other ideal of the Ramakrishna Mission is service. Ramakrishna's metaphor for this is a huge block of wood which can float even if heavy weights are put on it. A straw or small piece of wood will sink even if a sparrow sits on it while the huge block will take dozens of men and animals to the safety of the shore. We should aspire to be like the huge block and help those who are drowning in the sea of material existence to reach the shore by our own interior existence.

But not all can be good as teachers. Just like doctors Ramakrishna categorizes teachers of spirituality into three groups. The inferior group is that which just gives instructions (medicine) and forgets all about it. The medium group is that which gives instructions and repeatedly tells the aspirant (patient) to take it. But the best teacher (doctor) is one who uses force to make the aspirant swallow the instruction because he knows that the cure will be beneficial and worth the trouble.

To strengthen the desire for interior ex-

perience one has to constantly keep the company of like-minded people. This is often called satsanga. Ramakrishna's metaphor for this is the meeting of one hemp smoker with another. Both embrace each other and immediately make preparations to indulge in their common addiction. Similar is the state of people who have interest in inner dimensions.

Of course, once we have made progress the desire for communication reduces. It is metaphorically represented by the noise at a feast. As soon as people arrive there is great confusion and talk on numerous subjects. When the food arrives there is only one sound and that is the request for certain dishes to be served. Once the last course arrives there is only the sound of eating and finally when all have had their fill and gone off to sleep there is total silence.

It is like the silent communion of a pitcher which is full of water. Ramakrishna said that as long as the pitcher of our being is empty it makes great noise. Once it is filled with spiritual instruction it is absolutely lost in contemplation.

All this is brought about by faith. Here too Ramakrishna has a powerful metaphor. If a child holds his father's hand and walks on the narrow paths between paddy fields there is a possibility that he will slip and fall into the water. But when the father holds the child's hand there is no such danger. The aspirant has to be convinced that his/her father is holding his/her hand so that he/she can march ahead without slipping.

Such metaphors abound in the *Gospel* and one can go on listing them. Each metaphor can also be thought about deeply and interpreted variously. From all of them some vital lessons can also be drawn. In this way there is tremendous scope for reading and responding to this multifaceted text. Since time does not permit a more detailed discussion let us say this was an introduction to the numerous possibilities that are found in the *Gospel*. □

The Jewish Hymn 'Adon Olam'

DR APARNA CHATTOPADHYAYA

October is a sacred month for the Jews as a few of their special days—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Fast of Gedaliah, Sukkoth, etc—are celebrated this month. Dr Aparna Chattopadhyaya from Varanasi contributes articles to different journals. In this interesting article, she brings a sacred hymn of the Jews to our notice and compares it with the Hindu ideals.

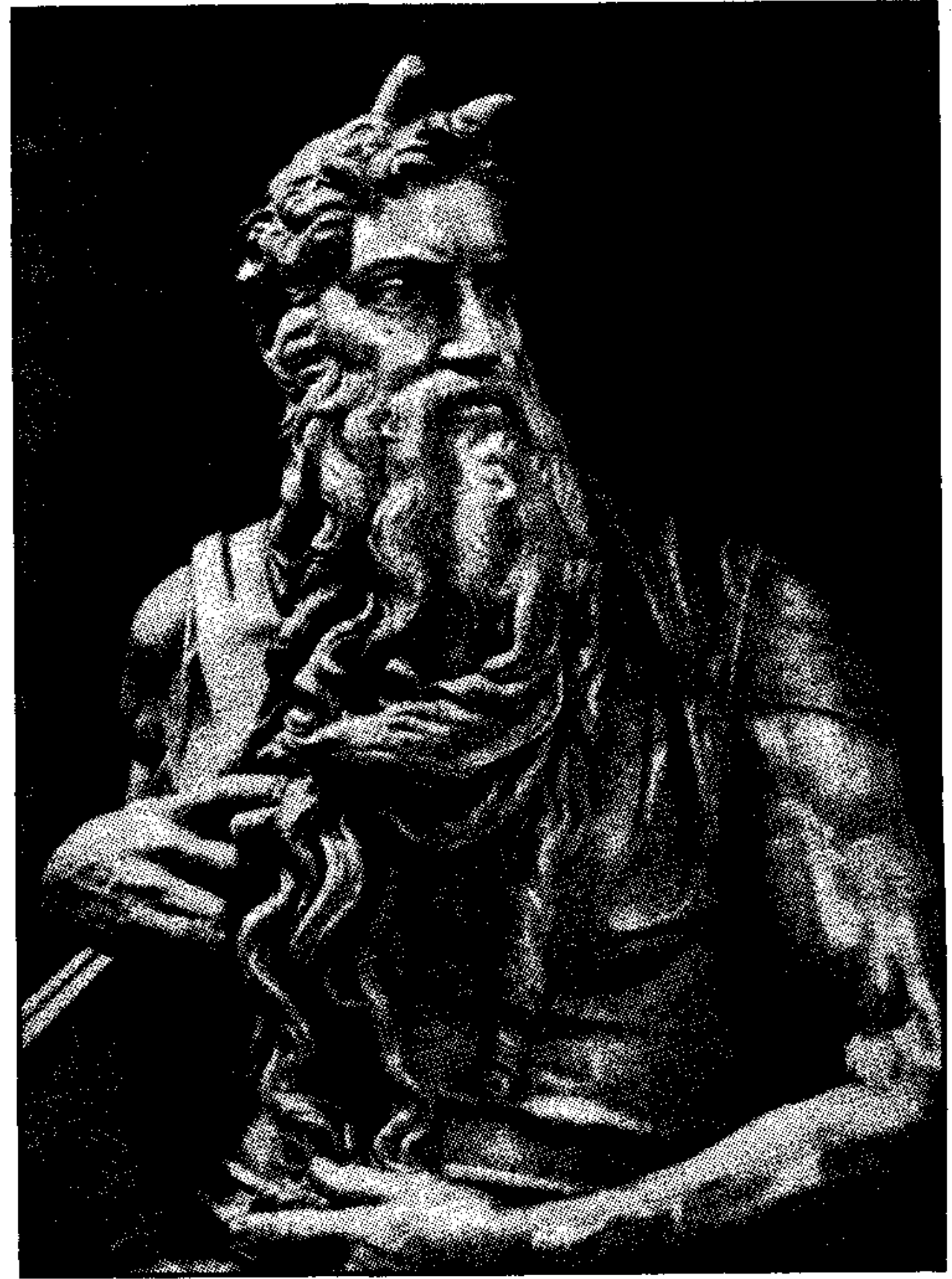
'Adon Olam' (Hebrew, meaning 'Eternal Lord' or 'The Lord of the Universe') is one of the most popular of all synagogue hymns of the Jewish religion. A dogmatic hymn of unknown authorship according to some, but written by the 11th-century poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol, according to *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, 'it extols in poetic form the unity, timelessness and providence of God in whom it also expresses faith and trust.'¹

The song, as translated into English by Henry George Borrow, a 19th century English author, runs as follows:

ADON OLAM

Reigned the Universe's Master
Ere were earthly things begun;
When His mandate all created,
Ruler was the name He won.
And alone He'll rule tremendous
When all things are past and gone,
He no equal has, nor consort,
He, the singular and lone,
Has no end and no beginning;
His the sceptre, might and throne.
He's my God and living Saviour,
Rock to Whom I in need run;
He's my banner and my refuge,
Fount of weal when call'd upon,
In His hand I place my spirit,
At nightfall and at rise of sun,
And therewith my body also;
God's my God—I fear no-one.

1. *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, ed. Dr R.J. Zwiwerslowsky and Dr Geoffery Wigoder (Jerusalem: 1967), p. 13.



Moses, the greatest Jewish prophet and lawgiver

This grand poem says that God is the Creator; 'His mandate all created.' One can notice Upaniṣadic ideas in this hymn. In the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, we read: 'In the beginning, there was only the Self (Atman) alone; nothing else existed. He thought "Let me create the worlds." Thus he created the worlds.'² The same idea is found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and the *Bhagavadgītā* also. Lord

2. *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1-2.



Devout Jews praying and reciting hymns before the Wailing Wall

Kṛṣṇa says that He is the source of all, the evolution of all.³ Both in the Bible and the Koran we see that God is the Creator of everything.

'Adon Olam' says further: 'He no equal has, nor consort. He, the singular and lone.' In the *Īśa Upaniṣad* we have the idea that God is one and alone (*ekam*), and is all-pervading.⁴ In the Koran also we have this statement: 'Allah is alone, and He is one.'⁵ The 'Adon Olam' says next: 'Has no end and no beginning.' This idea of God being *anādi* and *ananta* is very common in Hinduism. For instance, see *Bhagavadgītā*, 13.32. In the Koran, we find the same idea in the chapter on Unity, where God says that He is alone, the Eternal.

'His the sceptre, might and throne. He's my God and living Saviour.' These ideas are very similar to the first *sura* of the Koran, which is repeated at the time of prayers. 'All praise is to Allah, the Lord of the Universe. He is the most Merciful. He is the Lord of the Last

Day of Judgement....' The throne of God mentioned in 'Adon Olam' is seen in the Koran also. There, we find that God created the heaven and the earth in six days; then He made for the throne, to govern the affairs.

Thus the 'Adon Olam' can be compared with the spiritual ideals of different religions of the world, and we can find similarities everywhere. This hymn is generally recited at the beginning of the morning service in synagogues. It is also sung at the Ashkenazi rite.⁶ In some rites, it is sung after the evening service, on Sabbaths, and festi-

vals. Many Jews recite this prayer before going to sleep. In Morocco, it is recited during weddings. This shows that even during marriage, the idea that God is eternal, alone and everlasting is remembered. 'Adon Olam' became popular first with the German Jews. But its universal appeal led to its adoption as a Jewish prayer by all communities. It has been set to several musical tunes, the famous ones being those by Salomone de' Rossi (Italy, 17th century) and David Aaron de Sola (London, 19th century). □

3. *Bhagavadgītā*, 10.8.

4. *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*, 4.

5. *Koran*, *sura* IV, Akhlas.

6. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says: 'Ashkenazi has come from Hebrew *Ashkenaz*, "Germany". It is a term used to refer to any of the Jews who lived in the Rhineland valley and in neighbouring France before their migration eastward to Slavic lands (eg, Poland, Lithuania, Russia) after the Crusades (11th-13th century). In time, all Jews who had adopted the "German rite" synagogue ritual were referred to as Ashkenazim to distinguish them from Sephardic (Spanish rite) Jews.'

Manifesting Perfection Already in Man

SUNANDA SANYAL

What is the correct system of education? An experienced teacher shares his ideas with us. Sri Sunanda Sanyal is a well known writer, and contributes regularly to popular dailies. He was formerly the head of the department of English, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math. He was also a member of the Asoke Mitra Education Commission for some time. In this article, he presents a beautiful pen-picture of the value of correct education.

I am afraid I am going to write a rather long introduction before I get to the point I wish to make. I hope the reason for that will be clear as I go along. However, I may tell the reader straightway that the point of this essay is to stress the need for teaching *reading* which, alas, is being sadly neglected in our schools, despite the fact that it is going to be the most important tool of learning in the present century. My submission will be that the highly successful schools run by the Ramakrishna Mission nationwide are far and away the best suited to fill the gap.

The Ramakrishna Mission schools and colleges have turned out some of our finest brains in all fields of human endeavour. These institutions are aimed to be patterned, in deference to Swami Vivekananda's wishes, on the *gurukula* system, where the teacher and the taught come to regard themselves as *guru* and *sishtya* respectively. The idea is that the giving and receiving of *siksha* is as sacerdotal an activity as the worship of God is at a *mandir* or temple. A school

or a college is a 'temple of learning'.

The English education system, which we have borrowed from the British, who in turn had drawn on the Italian Renaissance, lets the

teacher and the taught befriend each other. The readers who have studied in the UK or the USA for example will vouch that this often happens there. But friendly relation is not quite the *guru-sishtya-samparka* as we understand it. The reason, it seems to me, is that the West treats 'teaching' and 'learning' as two distinct activities. The teachers at the institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission are expected to synthesize them instead.

What does this mean?

In *teaching* and *learning*, as conceived in the West, the input does not quite match the output. The experts who deal with teaching methodologies, relative to the English education system, admit that there is bound to be some slippage in between. In the Indian *siksha dana* and *siksha grahana* on the other hand, what is given is what is taken. The input here



The ancient gurukula system:
A painting by Upendranath Maharathi



Physical training at Ramakrishna Mission,
Agartala, Tripura

is intended to match the output. For, the main component, *siksha*—that is, teaching and learning synthesized—remains unaltered. This can happen only if the *data* (giver) and the *grihita* (taker) become one.

This is not to say that what is put in the learner's head is what comes out *unaltered*. The alchemy in the learner's brain transforms the input, and the product becomes something new and individualized. The teacher's role here is clearly crucial. He must carefully assess *every* learner's individual needs, choose the input accordingly, and make sure that no effort is wasted. After all, every success is an incentive for continued success and every failure is a frustration. So teaching must not be random—a hit-and-miss business.

This is not to denigrate the English education system either. In fact, Swami Vivekananda thought that both the *gurukula* and the English system had their merits, and wanted a system that combined the best of both. The result is for all to see. The institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission perform a great deal better not just in public examinations but also in public life. The synthesis aims at modern—one might say, state-of-the-art—education with *character* in mind. Swami Vivekananda said, what use is it being highly learned, if the learned man forgets about the down-and-out that have actually helped him along.

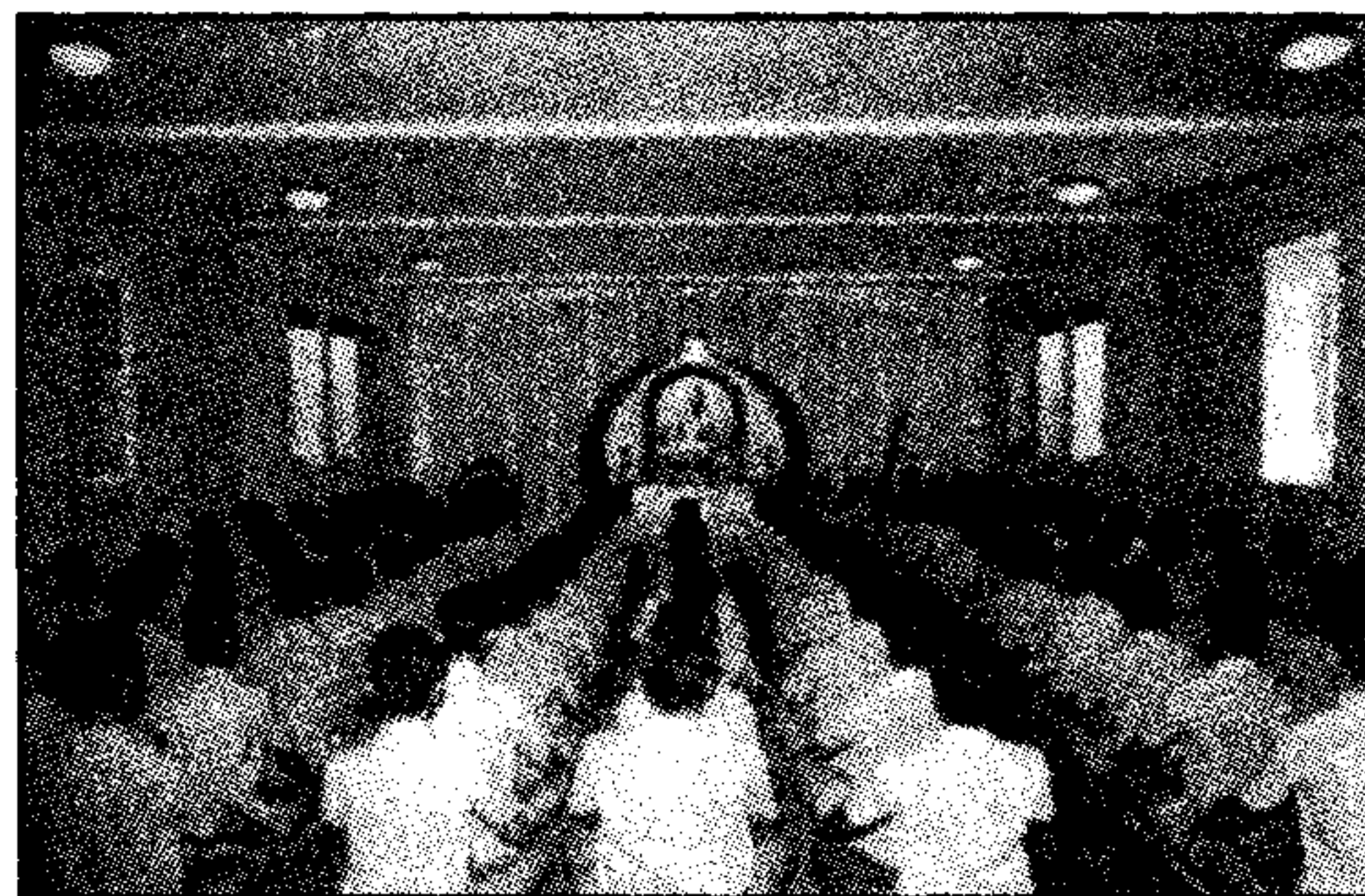
Having retired as a teacher from the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur

Math, the institution that Swamiji himself wanted, I have a feeling that these institutions differ in one important respect from both the *gurukula* and the English system. The English system, very good in many ways though it is, looks upon teaching and learning as a *transaction* between the teacher and the taught.

A common charge against the *gurukula*, on the other hand, is that this system requires the guru to be obeyed as the supreme authority. His word is law, which can be interpreted, and certainly mastered—but not challenged. English education, on the other hand, it is said, treats nothing as unquestionable. Learners are encouraged to question the teacher as a matter of rule. To what extent this is true is for researchers to find out. But what I can say with certainty is that Swamiji did not conceive education as such, much as he promoted the *gurukula*.

For one thing, Swamiji himself challenged his own guru, not once, but a number of times. His own guru encouraged him to do so. Swamiji, on his part, as his writings and speeches will testify, brushed aside none of the questions that his detractors flung at him: he answered them all till they were satisfied. For practical purposes, he virtually condemned those who followed even the scriptures thoughtlessly, eg the young men who went around, when their compatriots were starving, collecting funds for the 'propitiation of the Mother Cow (*go-mata*)'.

Speaking for myself, when I joined the



Prayer time at the Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore



A yogasana class for students

Vidyamandira as a junior lecturer back in 1960, Swami Tejasanandaji (or simply, our 'Principal Maharaj') cautioned me that my students would include some who were expected to come out at the top of the university examination. They might ask me 'quite difficult questions.' So I would be well advised to prepare myself thoroughly before facing them.

Years later, Swami Shivamayanandaji as principal gave me virtually a free hand in making experiments with English teaching. At one point he even let me involve *all* my colleagues of the humanities and social sciences departments in the teaching of a 'bridge course' in English. That is to say, the teachers of Sanskrit, Bengali, Economics, Political Science, History, and so on became English teachers for a few days. Thanks to the freedom granted to the English department, we started using gadgets like the tape recorder, record player and overhead projector in the classroom at a time when even the mention of these would be an anathema to the non-missionary institutions.

Actually, the *gurukula*, as Swamiji intended it, makes it an inalterable condition that the teacher becomes an object lesson to his students. While the learner learns by doing, the teacher also, on his part, teaches by doing. In the English system the teacher *transacts* the syllabus. In the *gurukula* the teacher lives it. In the English system it is enough if the teacher masters his subject and gets it across to his students. He does his duty sincerely, and gets

paid for it. Finished! He can go home. What he does with his own time is none of your business.

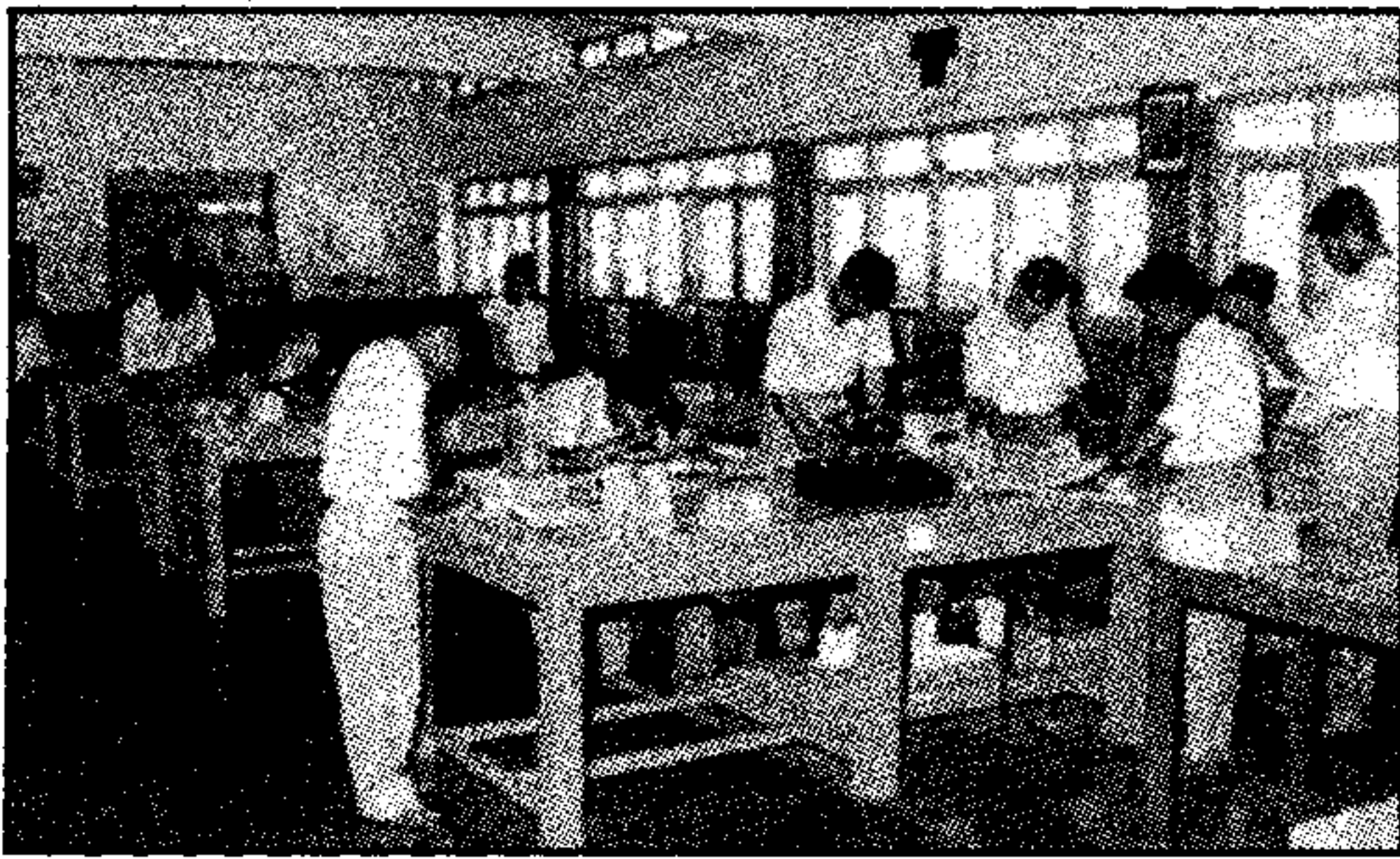
In other words, in the English system it is possible for the teachers to say, 'Do not do what I do, do what I tell you to do.' Swamiji on the other hand wants the teacher to tell his students, 'See what I do, how I do it, consider its worth, and then do what in conscience you feel like doing. I may be wrong. But you can see that I am acting in conscience.' Yes, *acting in conscience*—that is the only thing given as inviolable. And *that* forms character.

Which explains why Swamiji believed that 'education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' This is no day-dreamer's visionary gleam. Indeed, Swamiji, was nothing if not a *practical* idealist. Now that we have arrived at the new century, or the new millennium, if you like, the UNESCO calls upon the nations of the world to use education to bring out man's innate potential for perfection. Its document on twenty-first century education is titled *Learning: The Treasure Within—A Guided Tour*. The phrase *treasure within* echoes Swamiji's 'perfection already in man.'

To manifest man's innate perfection—or to bring out the treasure within him—is to develop *human* character. But, alas, fifty years of freedom notwithstanding, we are still nowhere close to manifesting that perfection—or the treasure within. The result is an explosion of knowledge sans wisdom. Owing



A computer class in progress



Science lab: Young scientists at work

to sheer technological progress, without character development side by side, men and women the world over today are closer to one another than ever before—yet so lonely. Telephones span the continents in a jiffy, the person you want to write to, or ‘chat’ with, may live at the other end of the globe. All the same, he is but a click of the mouse away, thanks to e-mail.

Be that as it might, broken marriages, so-called ‘single parenting’, children estranged from either or both the parents on the one hand, and chauvinism of all descriptions and senseless violence on the other, are tearing not just the world but also nations, societies and families apart. Man has never lived in such dread of untimely death as he does now when numerous life-saving drugs all but bring the dead back to life. All of that speaks of knowledge sans wisdom. I am not saying for one moment that we can do without knowledge. But let us not forget that knowledge is close to the head, and wisdom to the heart, or conscience. Swamiji prescribed knowledge with conscience.

Yes, acquire knowledge you must. Indeed, the modern teacher’s aim is not so much to *teach a subject* as to *demonstrate how to learn it*, for the simple reason that he cannot teach them all that they need to learn. So in the advanced and in many not-so-advanced countries today the education systems are being oriented towards giving the students what is called *learning readiness* right from the pri-

mary stage. The skill to read is the mainstay of learning readiness.

Language teachers often speak of four basic linguistic skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. A child listens to the language spoken all around and then begins to speak it at a certain point of his life. He is then taught the written forms of the language (if it is scripted) and finally he is taught to write it. This is the order of acquiring the four skills, which are separate though related; but there are exceptions, as in English teaching in this country, which, alas, starts with reading.

Some experts describe listening and reading as passive, and speaking and writing as active, skills. But opinion on this differs. In fact, looked at from the teacher’s point of view, reading does seem to be an active skill. It requires the reader to grapple with three levels of complexity simultaneously. Letters in cold print or handwriting are after all mere (*graphological*) marks on paper. At the first level they have to be decoded, that is translated into sounds and, at the second, processed in the head as sensible linguistic units. The third level involves the manipulation of the entire piece of text as a system of systems—the *tagmemic*, if you like—that is, the three semi-autonomous but interlocked levels of phonology, grammar and lexicon. The complexity increases, needless to say, according to the density of the text.

Once you have acquired facility in reading you do not notice the complexity much, except when you get to grips with pieces of



Gymnastics: The art of self-culture

particularly dense text. But the child finds the initiation itself perplexing. Consider just the pre-reading preparation. The very basic requirement for one to start reading a serious book is to settle down quietly at a place for a length of time. The exercise is not pleasant for a child, who is naturally restless.

Within living memory the initiation used to take place in the home rather than at school. In the not so old days when the joint family was the norm, some elders, more often than not grandparents, would call the children together and tell stories. Engrossed, they would sit at the same place for relatively long stretches of time, their eyes glued to the storyteller's face, absorbing every word that fell from his mouth—that is, absorbing both the auditory and visual signals, the word of mouth together with the facial signals.

The children would thus get the training in not just sitting quietly for a stretch of time but also in holding and processing the words of mouth in the head, and *sensing* them as *sight, sound, taste, smell* and *touch*. The next step, in the middle-class families at least, would be to read out stories to children, until finally they realized that they could access many more stories by reading them on their own.

In other words, reading for pleasure, which reading experts now prescribe as an excellent first step to reading for serious academic purposes, used to start before the children joined school, where of course they would get more intense and structured practice. But as in the home so at school practice generally started off with listening for increasingly long periods of time. In the history classes, for example, the teacher would give an oral account of, say, the Battle of Plassey, before the children went back home to look up the book for the confirmation in print of what the teacher had said.

Alas, for too many children now miss this preparation at home. The joint families have broken down into nuclear ones, which usually comprise parents and one or two kids. Sadly,

in many homes nowadays both the parents have to go out to work. They come back very tired. They have neither the inclination nor the time to tell stories. True, some mothers do stay at home, but they are usually busy with taking the child to school, swimming club, painting school and so on. Storytelling does not seem to be on the parents' agenda today.

Much of the spare time a typical nuclear family has is spent, in all probability, on TV. Indeed, television is often blamed for taking up a lot of our students' time, which they would have, it is argued, otherwise spent on books. I will presently come to my own grouse against TV, but I won't be detailed on this common complaint, for the simple reason that we cannot jam the skies. We have to live with TV, and now the Internet, and yet try to make our students good readers nevertheless.

Well, doesn't TV tell stories? Of course it does! It in fact tells a lot of them, since its news bulletins, adverts, not to speak of soaps, are all stories in a manner of speaking. But this does not seem to be quite the training needed for settling down to chew over serious reading material for a length of time. For unlike the radio, or the grandparent, TV not just tells the story, it also *shows* it. A TV story is both sight and sound, if not more sight than sound, that engage the children's attention. TV cannot stand in for the grandparent as storyteller for the simple reason that it shows *everything*. It leaves nothing to imagination. So, much as it may be an excellent audiovisual teaching aid when appropriately used, it makes a mess when it comes to preparing the child for reading.

The word of mouth on the other hand is an indispensable pre-reading exercise because it is a close approximation of the cold print. The children gathered round the grandparent in the old days could *see* it all when she told of the princess, beautiful as a lotus, in a palanquin, being waylaid in a dense jungle, enveloped in darkness that was so thick that you could prick it with a needle. And the highwayman was a veritable demon; his skin was

as dark as tar and moustache thicker than the bush around.

On the other hand, the children who 'hear' all stories from TV rather than caring adults of flesh and blood miss practice in a number of indispensable steps to become good readers: one, the *physical* training to sit down quietly at a place for various lengths of time; two, the training to *hold, accumulate* and *process* in the head the bare words of mouth, unaided by any crutch; and three, the training to develop the *interpersonal relationship* that enables the teacher and the taught to bear with one another. Listening to stories by a live person has a humanizing influence.

True, TV achieves a closeness of sorts by making the viewers—parents and kids, in our example—sit down together in front of the box. But, mind you, the ground rule for viewing is that you shut up, sit with your eyes glued to the stage, or the big or the small screen, as the case may be.

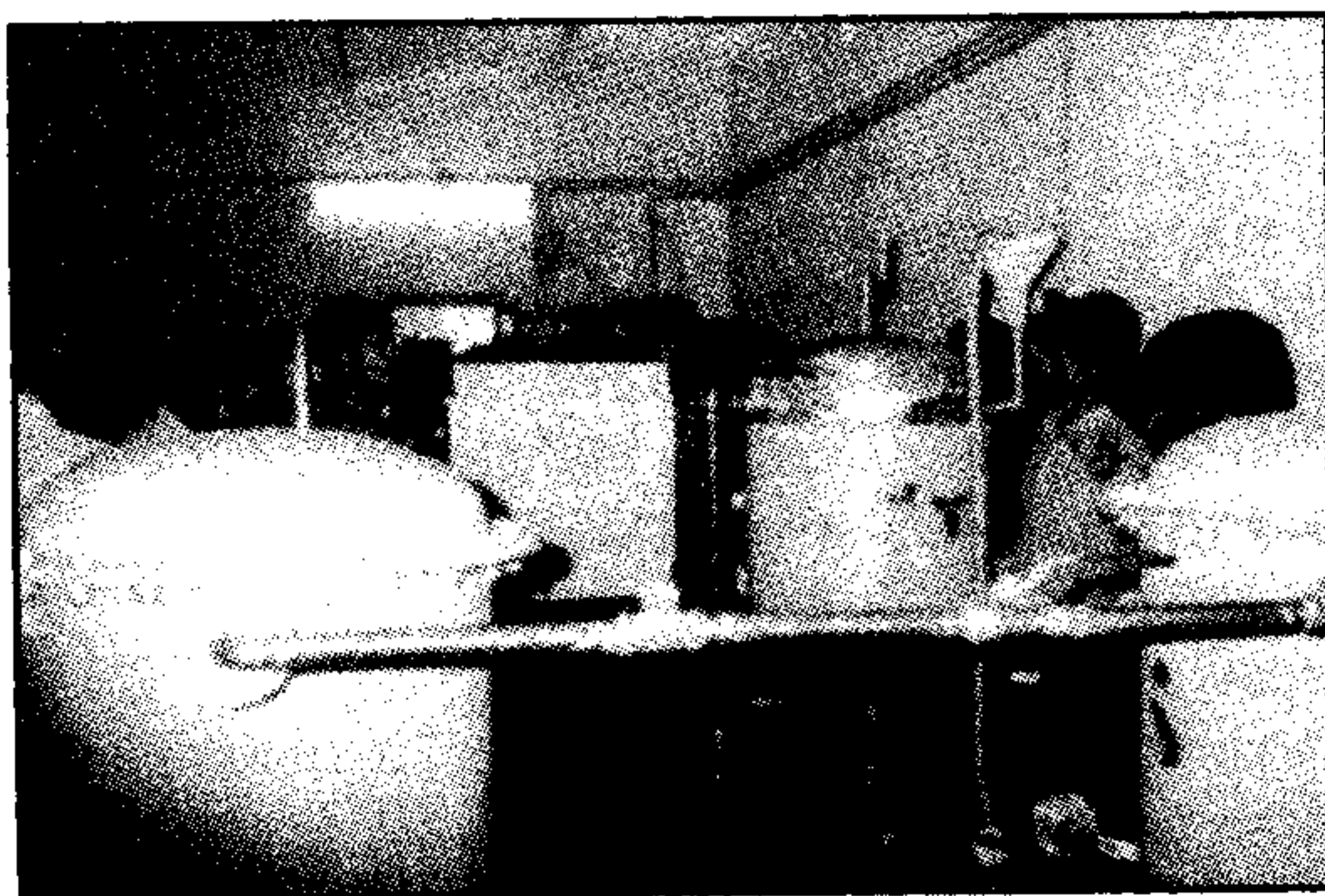
The rule is no doubt stricter when what is being viewed is happening on the stage or the big screen. But unlike the stage or the big screen, TV does not give you any escape root. If you are watching TV in your bedroom, so are your children. This has serious implications for the classroom teacher.

Many parents will admit that they have no choice but to view overly romantic scenes together with their children. Some parents of course seldom turn on the TV set for fear of such scenes. Their children consider them, as psychiatrists will confirm, kill-sports. The absence of close interpersonal relationship between parents and children is bad, but the relationship gone wrong is worse.

I am not suggesting that TV on its own

sours the relationship between the parents and the children whom we get as pupils in school. But what is certain is that it does not let interpersonal relationship grow among the viewers and the 'storyteller'. The storytellers or those who act out the parts on TV have glamour, but they are insubstantial all the same. Their tone of voice, however endearing, children quickly perceive, is after all put on. The children can't press against them, or ask for more, the way their predecessors who gathered round their grandparents could.

I submit that a great many children today are coming to school with but little experience of interpersonal relationship, which, under-



Training in honey extraction at Ramakrishna Mission, Morabadi, Ranchi

standably, teachers and pupils need in transacting (in terms of English education) the syllabus, including reading exercises, in the classroom. The children that hear all the stories from TV neither can 'hear' nor 'visualize' the rain pattering on leaves as they look at the cold print of the story on paper.

per.

Well, we cannot bring back the joint family. And the question of persuading parents to tell stories is neither here nor there. In many advanced and not so advanced countries today storytelling is increasingly done in the nursery classes that now draw children two to three years of age. In this country the pre-school stage exists, alas, on paper only. The Asoke Mitra Commission (1992) of West Bengal found that 'not much has been achieved (in repairing school buildings) in the past fifteen years; a vast majority of the schools continue to be overcrowded; children are huddled in worn-out, ramshackle structures or *kutchha* sheds exceedingly vulnerable to the elements. ... The attendance on the part

of teachers is irregular and fitful. Members of the Commission during their tour of the districts had some evidence of habitual absenteeism on the part of teachers; such has also been partly the experience of members of the Subjects Committee on Education of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.'

The conditions are pretty much the same everywhere India, as far as the common school system is concerned. Under such circumstances there can be no question of telling stories. The children get no practice at all in listening for any length of time. The same goes for the tertiary level, where the colleges have to admit twice or three times more students than they can normally handle. Students like these cannot simply be accommodated if they all choose to attend college on any day.

Soon after admission, they troop out of college and return not long before the final exams are held. They rely entirely on private tuition, which in most cases consists in ready-made answers to exam questions. On top of it, the so-called 'coaching classes' too are getting increasingly overcrowded, precluding all possibilities of discussion. And as everybody knows, political parties of all hues use many of these students in doing their dirty work.

That is to say, during the past several years the students have altogether missed even the most basic training in reading—namely, that of sitting quietly at a place. Indeed, the few among them who have finished a serious book, a novel or whatever,

have done so in spite of, not because of, the system. It is easy to understand why under these circumstances even at the postgraduate stage, where at least classes are still held regularly, the teachers get few students.

What is worse, there is no possibility of getting rid of the mess in the near future. For one thing, the governments in the states and at the centre will not find enough money to set up an adequate number of schools. So all the noise we hear about education appropriate for the twenty-first century is just for the record only if you bear in mind the fact that while, on the one hand, we have gained no new teaching skill, even in terms of English education, on

the other, we have meanwhile lost the potential that our family system inherited.

I believe the Ramakrishna Mission schools and colleges are the best suited to fill the gap here. Prayer is routine in all these institutions. Which is excellent from the teacher's point of



Spreading education amongst tribal children:
Swami Smarananandaji visits our Along centre

view as it gives them practice in concentration, without which serious reading is impossible. But I may ask for a little more from the missionaries. I would say, if I may, that these institutions should add storytelling to the routine. I remember attending, some sixty years ago, a so-called Sunday School at Pabna (now in Bangladesh), run by Christian missionaries who held us together by just telling the stories of the Bible. Their aim was to proselytize, no doubt. But that cannot take away from the fact that they gave us intensive practice in listening. □

A Mother-Worshipper's Story

'Allow me in!' said the monk. The guards replied: 'Holy man, we're very sorry. But you can't enter now.' The monk said: 'I must meet your king immediately!' The gatekeepers bowed humbly before him and said: 'Our king is in the worship room, sir, and none can disturb him at this time.' The monk said: 'You see, I'm a monk and have something to tell him.' The gatekeepers were helpless: 'Kindly wait for some time, holy sir. You will be allowed inside as soon as his worship is over.' 'I can't wait. I've to go...so...tell your king this much: "Thinking of bangles and worshipping Divine Mother can't go hand in hand."' The monk walked away very quickly as he had come, even as the stunned gatekeepers kept staring at him.

When the king, Raja Ramakrishna, came out of the worship room, the gatekeepers approached him and narrated what all had happened. 'Ah! A monk came to our doorstep and he couldn't be entertained!' exclaimed the king sadly. He then asked: 'What did the holy man say?' The gatekeepers were scared to relate what they had heard, but one of them said humbly: 'He asked us to tell you that...er...that...thinking of bangles and worshipping the Divine Mother cannot go hand in hand.' At once the king changed. He darted out of the palace like an arrow and began looking for the monk himself. His entourage followed him hurriedly. People stared at their king even as he walked through the bazaar like an ordinary man. He looked for the monk everywhere but couldn't find him; so he returned sadly. His men also tired themselves out, trying to locate the monk. When they all reported failure, he warned everyone: 'The next time any holy man comes, take care to call me immediately.'

The king was worried. How could the strange monk know? Yes, he had been think-

ing of bangles while worshipping the Divine Mother. But how did an unknown monk come to know of it? And who could that monk be? How right the monk was! Though he was worshipping his dear Mother of the Universe, that day the king's mind had been running towards the bangles repeatedly.

The queen had asked for a pair of bangles, and the king had told the minister to arrange for it. The queen was enquiring him about them repeatedly, but the king was being told the jeweller had yet to give finishing touches to them. Not completed till now? 'A *Prthvipati* indeed,' thought the king and smiled at himself. He began thinking of all that had happened during the past few years in his life...

☆☆☆

Emperor Shah Alam had called him '*Mahārājādhirāja Prthvipati Bahādūr*, the greatest of kings and the lord of earth.' He was happy when he got that title, for he always wished to please his foster mother whom he considered a divine being. Rani Bhavani, the queen of Natore, had adopted him as her son as she was childless. She had placed him on the throne and gone away for performing austerities. He was initially happy with his responsibilities. But when the tiny kingdom came under the British, worries began. Lord Cornwallis had annexed the land and had ordered the king to pay taxes. But where was the money to pay such huge taxes? So much of the land had to be sold away. Several chunks of Natore had already been taken away by ambitious landlords and others. The wealth of his little Natore had already been reduced to next to nothing because of the huge taxes.

The king knew only one thing: his Divine Mother. His refuge was the Divine Mother. His subjects respected him for his devotion.

Not that there weren't any problems because he was more drawn to the Divine Mother. His treasury had been an open sesame to some at least. His administration had hit rock bottom, or so he imagined. But somehow things went on smoothly. There had been an eternal conflict in the king's mind about whether he should continue as king, or relinquish the post to devote himself fully to his Divine Mother. The latest issue, the jeweller's delay in bringing the bangles, had increased his mental unrest. So his mind had wandered during puja.

'I'm the king of Natore,' he would tell his mind occasionally, but once he entered the worship room and saw the image of his blissful Mother, all his responsibilities flew away from his mind. He would then become a simple devotee, performing mental puja to the Divine Mother with a dedication which had no parallel. Some wicked people would trouble him because of his otherworldliness.



Days went by. The bangles came, of course, and the incident was forgotten. But the king couldn't forget the monk's words at all. The monk's words had taken effect, and he worshipped the Mother with greater dedication and concentration. His devotion to Her also increased proportionately.

One day, the king was in his worship room. His mind was agitated that day too, but for a different reason. A gatekeeper came running and announced the arrival of the same monk once again. The king almost jumped up from his seat and rushed to meet the monk.

There he stood, a brilliant monk with bright eyes and a fair countenance. The king saluted him. He seated him, and himself sat at his feet. There was an everlasting smile on the monk's lips. 'O king! You are worried about garlanding the Mother? Remove the crown and garland her! It's as easy as that!'

This stunned the king absolutely. 'How-ever do you know my mind?' he asked in bewilderment. After months of systematic, con-

centrated worship, that day there had been trouble once again. The king wanted to garland the Divine Mother during his mental worship, but since the crown he had placed on her head had been quite big, he couldn't garland her. He had forced his mind several times to garland her but had failed. And suddenly the monk had arrived. 'Who are you, holy sir, and how do you know so much?'

The monk said: 'Don't you remember me, O king? I am Purnananda, and you and I were performing sadhana together in our previous birth! Remember?...Did it come to your mind?...Yes?' Yes, it had. Slowly it had dawned on the king's mind that he had been a Mother worshipper in his previous birth also.

Tears rolled down his cheeks. He had been a devotee and both he and Purnananda had struggled hard to attain the Truth.

The king tried his utmost to retain Purnananda, but the monk walked away. The king understood now. The crown had been the only obstacle. Remove the crown, and you can garland the Mother, he told his mind. He sent word to his foster mother, Devi Bhavani. She came. 'Mother, you ran this kingdom so well. You built so many temples and looked after the subjects with such love. But no, I can't. I can't concentrate my mind on the kingdom anymore. You can see the divisions and treachery. You know the problems. I beg you, O mother! Please take back this kingdom and relieve me of my kingship.'

Devi Bhavani tried to convince her son. She too had been leading a life of intense spirituality and wanted to continue that life. But no, the king wouldn't budge. He had the Divine Mother's command: the crown had to be removed in order to garland her.

Devi Bhavani assumed office once again, and the king was free to devote himself to spirituality now. His prayers became intense, his devotion became deep, and the Mother couldn't wait any longer. □

Book Reviews

**ENLIGHTENMENT BEYOND TRADITIONS:
THE COMPLETE INNER MAP OF SPIRITUAL
AWAKENING: By Aziz Kristof and
Houman Emami. Published by Motilal
Banarsidass, 41-UA Jawahar Nagar, New
Delhi 110007. 1999. Pp. 190. Rs.150.**

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of spiritual realization as the only goal of human existence and validated all paths which led to this realization as true. A person who chooses the path best suited to his/her temperament succeeds in reaching the goal; while a mode which is not suitable to an individual creates problems of progress. The authors of the volume under review, we are told, have tried almost all the traditional paths available and come up with their own recipe of spiritual awakening which they have bracketed as 'beyond traditions'.

These two dedicated seekers practised for many years and together they reached the pinnacle of their evolution, which they describe as 'Pure Rest'. The purpose of the book is, of course, quite similar to that of the usual spiritual quest outlined in any well-known tradition: 'to show clearly the journey of consciousness from ignorance and confusion towards the full realization of the "I Am,"' (p. xv) and its culmination 'going beyond the illusion of spirituality, one at last discovers Oneself' (p. xvi).

The concept of 'Pure Rest' forms the cornerstone of the book's argument. This is the map which leads to enlightenment and its difference from various traditions occupies the major part of the volume. There are, of course, at every point, practical instructions about the manner in which this state of 'Pure Rest' is achieved.

According to the authors, 'Pure Rest is a condition free from the movement of consciousness, though the presence is still experienced on the periphery' (p. 56). Elaborate descriptions of the 'presence' are also available in the course of the various sections of the volume.

The book is divided into four sections following the introductory one which deals with the revelation of the beyond, the vision of the book and the map of awakening. The sections are devoted to discussion on the realm of the inner, the realm of the human, the realm of the divine and the realm of the wholeness. In the first section entitled 'Realm of the Inner' the chapter devoted to Vipassana and *koans* are of special interest to readers of comparative spiritual traditions.

The second section speaks of concepts such as free will, ego, the purpose of suffering and misconceptions about enlightenment. The 'Realm of the Divine' has units on soul and identity but the final chapter of this section on Buddha Mind and Christ Consciousness needs special commendation.

The last section, devoted as it is to 'Wholeness', speaks about samadhi, non-duality, intelligence, and the seekers' goal, among other things. While summarizing the characteristics of the inner states the volume concentrates specially on the 'State of Presence' and 'The Absolute State'.

In effect, all the traditional tools of enlightenment are evoked to contrast them with the findings of the authors of this 'new' path which they are convinced is beyond these traditions. A well-written and well-produced volume, which will find favour with those who are interested in using the tool of discrimination while progressing on the path of spiritual awakening.

Dr M. Sivaramkrishna

*Formerly Professor and Head, Dept of English
Osmania University, Hyderabad*

**'FOR THE SOUL' SERIES — (1) SILENCE,
(2) MIND, (3) THOUGHT, (4) FAITH, (5)
TRUTH, (6) PRAYER, (7) LOVE, (8) FEARLESS-
NESS AND (9) DIVINE GRACE: By M. M.
Walia. Published by Sterling Publishers,
L-10 Green Park Extension, New Delhi
110016. 2001. Each Book about 60 pages.
Price not mentioned.**

Dr M.M. Walia has done a beautiful work in compiling some sayings from different sources to bring out an excellent series of books (rather, booklets) which aim at inspiring people to lead pious lives. *Mind* is about the capacities of the mind. The methods of mental control, the ways of using the controlled mind for higher purposes, the uses of yoga, pranayama, etc, are dealt with very briefly in this book. *Thought* is about how thought can be used for one's own benefit as well as that of others. A positive mental attitude is what is needed to succeed in life, and this idea is stressed well. The central teaching of this book is, 'As are your thoughts, so must be your life.' *Fearlessness* is a systematic analysis of what fear does, and what fearlessness does. 'Do not fight fear,' but 'fight those things that cause fear' is the idea. Once we hold on to God there will be no fear. He will take care of us. This leads us

to faith. *Faith* is about the virtues of faith. 'The degradation of an individual begins when he loses faith in the power of God,' and also in himself. As Sri Ramakrishna is quoted in the end, 'He who has faith has all.' This faith needs to be cultivated. It doesn't grow all on a sudden. Sometimes the so-called blind-faith is a good beginning. *Silence* is yet another beautiful booklet about the value of silence. Silence itself is a meditation. The author mentions four kinds of *mauna* (silence), and says that *mauna* where the body, mind, and everything else is silent is the best. We should aim at that goal so that our mind can function properly, and our heart can attain the highest. *Truth* is about truth as the goal and truth as the way. Truthfulness is always eulogized as the best moral virtue which will lead us to God. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna says repeatedly that truthfulness is the austerity of this age. If we are truthful, we have come nearer to God. And God indeed is Truth. Dr Walia writes: 'Practise that boldness which dares to know the Truth, which dares to show the Truth in life, which does not quake before death.' The next book is *Prayer*. Open page 35 of this book, and it is written in bold letters: 'Prayer has infinite powers.' This is the central teaching of all saints and seers. Walia has selected several beautiful prayers from the *Japji Saheb*, the Bible, the Koran, and other texts. The next book is *Love*. *Love* deals with devotion. Quoting extensively from Swami Vivekananda, the author has dealt with the various aspects of devotion to the Divine in this book. *Divine Grace* is about the grace of God and the guru. It enquires into the difference between predestination and grace in a light way, and stresses on the *Gita* idea of surrendering everything to God and receiving His grace.

Dr M.M. Walia has selected suitable sayings of many well known spiritual leaders and saints to stress his ideas. The books, though perhaps requiring a little remodelling in terms of systematization, are quite inspiring and useful. They are best placed in the hands of today's younger generation who are disillusioned about their own future.

We thank Dr Walia for his efforts, and the publishers for printing the books beautifully.

Prabuddha Bharata

**UNRAVELLING THE ENIGMA—SHIRDI
SAI BABA IN THE LIGHT OF SUFISM: By
Marianne Warren. Published by Sterling
Publishers. 1999. Pp. 440. Rs.375.**

The book under review is based on Marianne Warren's research on the life and teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba. Ms Warren teaches philosophy, psychology and religion at the University of Toronto, Canada. Warren has successfully tried to es-

tablish that historically the Sai Baba of Shirdi belonged to the Maharashtrian Sufi tradition.

The book is divided into three parts, and contains fifteen chapters in all. Part I focuses on the life of Shirdi Sai Baba with particular reference to Maharashtrian mysticism. Using authentic data, the author establishes that the Baba was born in 1838 in a brahmin family and was raised by a Sufi fakir. The author states emphatically that Sai Baba must have had a thorough training in the Islamic tradition in his early days before becoming a Sufi master in later life. According to the author the Baba left no writings behind and his teachings are embodied in the talks given by him to his devotees, which were compiled by his biographers. The Baba taught using analogies, anecdotes and parables. The author provides a historical background of Sufism in Maharashtra which she links with the bhakti movement of the state.

Warren has devoted a major portion of the book to a detailed study of Sufi mysticism. She maintains that Sufism had its origin in the inspired words of the Koran and the mystical sayings of the Prophet. In Part II Ms Warren refers to one Abdul, a long-time servitor of the Baba, whom he taught to read; she refers to Abdul's notebook which contains jottings of the Baba's occasional teachings to him. The author has devoted a full chapter to an elaborate analysis of the book, which was originally written in Urdu. In Part III, the author says that the Hindu espousal of the Baba and his being owned as a Hindu saint gained momentum after his death in 1918. The Hindus did not take the Baba into their fold with some deliberation but it was their very ethos that made them own the saint.

Ms Warren has not only studied available material on the Baba but has also visited India to explore facts connected with the saint. Warren has a lucid style which makes her writing appealing. Towards the end of the book are recorded the Eleven Promises of the Baba, which are very reassuring and inspiring. *Unravelling the Enigma* is a valuable book.

Lt Col R.K. Langar
Jammu

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BHARATA**

News and Reports

New Mission Centre

A new branch of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started in Lusaka, Zambia, under the name *Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Lusaka*. Its address is: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Nsunzu Road, PO Box 31588, Lusaka, Zambia (Phone: 260-1-25-3090).

Swami Brahmeshanandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

Ramakrishna Mission Relief

Orissa Flood Relief

As soon as news was received of the havoc caused by heavy rains in several parts of Orissa in the middle of July, rendering lakhs of people homeless, our centres and relief camp in Orissa started relief operations in three districts. Cooked food (rice and *dalma*) and dry food, such as *chira* (rice flakes), *gur* (molasses), sugar, etc are being served and medical relief provided to the flood-victims. Details of the relief operations are given below:

Centre/ Relief Camp	Areas of Operation			Beneficiaries		Patients Treated
	District	Blocks	Number of Villages	Dry Food	Cooked Food	
Puri Math	Puri	Sadar, Gop, Brahmagiri, Kakatpur	95	13,249	84,980	2,477
Puri Mission	Puri	Puri Sadar, Gop	44	5,187	47,075	228
Bhubaneswar	Cuttack	Kantapada	7	6,320	—	—
Bhubaneswar	Jaipur	Rasulpur, Badachana, Dangadi, Bari	17	14,749	—	—
Kanaguli Camp	Jaipur	Report awaited				

Gujarat Earthquake Rehabilitation

Two government primary schools newly rebuilt by our Porbandar centre were inaugurated: the one at Bileshwar village by Sri Mulubhai Bera, Minister of State for Small and Medium Irrigation, Government of Gujarat, on 21 July 2001, and the other at Vanana village by Dr Vallabhbhai Kathiria, Minister of State for Heavy Industries, Government of India, on 29 July 2001. Both the schools have been renamed 'Vivekananda Vidya Mandir'. The 50 houses undertaken by the centre are in different stages of construction.

The progress report of the school buildings being constructed through our Porbandar and Limbdi centres and by the relief camp at Surendranagar is as follows:

Centre/Camp	Taken Up	Handed Over	Casting of Slab	Roof Level	Lintel Level	Plinth Level	Excavation
Porbandar	21	4	6	6	—	—	3
Limbdi	9	—	2	3	1	—	—
Surendranagar	7	—	—	—	—	3	4